

Rethinking “Wuwei Governance” under the Criticality Hypothesis of International Politics: Conditional Dynamical Correspondences

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Abstract

This paper examines whether the Criticality Hypothesis of International Politics can help illuminate a restricted set of governance-oriented propositions reconstructed in relation to *wuwei*. The comparison is explanatory rather than identificatory: historical interpretation, empirical regime attribution, mechanism specification, normative justification, and political authorization retain separate burdens of support. The predecessor hypothesis proposes that international politics may, at some scales and intervals, occupy near-critical regimes in which organized persistence coexists with elevated susceptibility and continuing reconfigurability. The present paper distinguishes four analytical propositions with unequal historical proximity: configuration-sensitive response; restraint toward task-extraneous dynamical forcing; conditional openness of terminal form; and preservation of revisability through continued possibilities for return, functional recovery, or future redirection. Non-forcing has the closest interpretive motivation; configuration sensitivity is an indirect analytical reconstruction, terminal openness a looser contemporary extension, and revisability an explicit contemporary extension. The analysis separates intervention magnitude from structural forcing, treats relational tensions as possible participants in transformation, and evaluates candidate mechanisms through an explicit cross-framework correspondence protocol. Within the present framework, configuration sensitivity, task-relative non-forcing, and revisability meet the paper’s criteria for candidate explanatory correspondences, while terminal openness retains a larger unresolved bridge because admissibility and terminal-selection criteria must be supplied independently of the dynamics. Even these assessments remain conceptual rather than empirical. A specifically criticality-based interpretation requires the further showing that the joint near-critical profile contributes explanatory leverage beyond generic nonlinearity, adaptation, or path dependence. The methodological proposal is an explanatory reconstruction with retained remainder: contemporary dynamics may clarify restricted practical propositions while historical meaning, empirical validity, and normative standing remain separately contestable. The resulting claims are preliminary and depend on defensible interpretation, representation, horizon and scope choices, and independent support for the relevant near-critical dynamics.

Keywords: wuwei; criticality hypothesis; international politics; non-forcing; revisability

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The author encourages good-faith discussion, criticism, independent inquiry, and responsible use of the material in this work. The paper develops an abstract theoretical framework rather than recommendations concerning any particular state, government, alliance, political movement, or contemporary conflict. Applications should preserve the distinction between dynamical explanation, empirical evidence, normative justification, legal authority, and political legitimacy.

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Notices

Status. This manuscript is an exploratory discussion paper. Its interpretation of *wuwei*, formal constructions, explanatory correspondences, and criticality-based mechanisms remain open to revision. The Criticality Hypothesis of International Politics is used conditionally and is not treated as an established empirical law.

Statement on the use of language models. The exploratory discussions and preparation of this paper involved OpenAI’s ChatGPT. ChatGPT supported exploratory dialogue, source discovery followed by verification, conceptual reconstruction, argumentative criticism, and LaTeX drafting. Language-model output is not cited as scholarly evidence; external claims rely on the sources listed in the manuscript. The author selected the research problem, directed and approved the theoretical commitments, and bears sole responsibility for the manuscript, including its definitions, claims, interpretations, and errors. Authorship credit remains with the human author.

1 Introduction

This section defines the explanatory problem and the boundaries of the inquiry. Reconsidering a classical philosophical concept through contemporary theory raises at least three distinct questions: whether a philosophical intuition has historical or textual support; whether a modern scientific or formal framework can help explain why a restricted version of that intuition may have practical significance under specified conditions; and whether the intuition is normatively justified for present governance. The analysis concentrates on the second question. Historical interpretation and normative justification remain separate tasks. Against this separation, the central inquiry asks whether a conditional account of international-political dynamics can illuminate a restricted family of governance-oriented propositions reconstructed in relation to *wuwei*, without turning that mechanism into either new textual evidence or a governance doctrine.

The term *wuwei* has often been translated in ways that invite a misleading identification with inactivity. Contemporary scholarship presents a more differentiated picture. Slingerland’s systematic study of early Chinese thought treats *wuwei* as a broad ideal whose renderings include “effortless action,” and his treatment of the *Laozi* explicitly cautions against interpreting it as genuine passivity even where the language of non-doing is especially prominent (Slingerland 2003a; Slingerland 2003b). Chan similarly notes that translations such as non-assertive or non-coercive action attempt to capture dimensions that the literal expression “nonaction” can obscure, and also observes that many passages of the received *Laozi* address rulers or ruling elites while placing political order within a broader ethical-spiritual setting (Chan 2025). This provides a defensible basis for a governance-oriented inquiry, but not for treating *wuwei* as a ready-made modern governance theory. The narrower task here is to construct several explicitly restricted propositions in relation to these interpretations and then ask whether contemporary dynamical reasoning can illuminate their practical intelligibility.

The explanatory background is the *Criticality Hypothesis of International Politics*, developed in an earlier paper (Huang 2026). That hypothesis treats international politics as a heterogeneous, historically evolving, adaptive relational system and proposes, conditionally, that some relational configurations may occupy regimes in which organized persistence coexists with elevated susceptibility and substantial capacity for reconfiguration. The minimum claim is explicitly weaker than a theory of permanent criticality, a universal critical point, or a law applying uniformly across political scales. It is also weaker than the paper’s separate endogenous and restorative hypotheses, which concern possible origins or feedback mechanisms capable of generating or restoring near-criticality (Huang 2026). Only the minimum layer required for the present inquiry is carried forward. Stronger endogenous, restorative, or transition mechanisms enter only where they are separately stated and justified.

The predecessor paper also places several methodological constraints on the present inquiry. It separates the immediate direction of a perturbation from its later systemic function; distinguishes raw re-

sponse variety from an effective response repertoire; treats reachable futures as representation-, horizon-, and constraint-relative rather than as predictions; and repeatedly separates dynamical efficacy from normative authority (Huang 2026). These distinctions block a tempting shortcut in which near criticality is treated as a reason for less intervention and *wuwei* is subsequently redescribed as a philosophy of doing less. The criticality hypothesis supplies no such monotonic implication, and the philosophical reconstruction developed below is concerned with the structure and revisability of response rather than intervention quantity alone.

The analysis begins from a more demanding possibility. When an evolving relational system is nonlinear, state-dependent, path-dependent, and capable of changing the structure through which later responses occur, immediate intervention magnitude may be an incomplete description of practical effect. A small intervention can, under some configurations, produce large and persistent consequences, while a materially substantial protective intervention can remain comparatively revisable when it is temporary, bounded, and supported by credible recovery pathways. For this reason, the paper distinguishes *response magnitude* from *dynamical forcing*. The amount of visible activity associated with a response need not measure how strongly the response constrains the subsequent relational trajectory. Structural forcing can depend on whether the response closes alternative paths, alters later coupling structures, reduces recoverability, or makes future correction more difficult. A theory of *wuwei* reconstructed through this lens consequently concerns the relation between a response and the evolving field into which that response enters, with intervention intensity treated as a separate analytical dimension.

A second distinction concerns control and responsiveness. A stylized target-control architecture can be represented by Equation 1.

$$u_t = \pi(\omega_t, \omega^*), \quad (1)$$

where ω_t denotes the represented current relational configuration and ω^* a specified target configuration or trajectory. Equation 1 does not stand for control theory in general, nor does it imply that every policy process fixes a complete terminal state. It isolates one ideal-typical feature: the direction of response is substantially organized by deviation from a previously specified target.

A responsive architecture allows more of the response to depend on the evolving relational field. A schematic form is given in Equation 2.

$$u_t = \rho(\omega_t, \eta_t, H_t, \mathcal{R}_t, \mathcal{A}_t), \quad (2)$$

where η_t denotes the perturbation or change to which a response is being considered, H_t the realized relational history, $\mathcal{R}_t$ a representation of recovery or revisability conditions, and $\mathcal{A}_t$ the set or family of responses treated as available at the relevant scale. Equation 2 leaves open whether a target is also present; the distinction is consequently not binary. The analytical point is that responsiveness permits the evolving configuration, its history, and its future correction structure to participate directly in the generation of response.

This difference becomes especially important when the system's own contradictions or relational tensions are part of the process through which later configurations are generated. The present paper uses dialectical language in a restricted analytical sense. A contradiction or tension is not assumed to be beneficial, historically progressive, or normatively entitled to persist. It refers to a relational configuration in which competing tendencies cannot be simultaneously realized without modifying the structure through which they interact. Such a tension can be represented schematically by a triple $C_t = (r_i, r_j, \Gamma_t)$, where r_i and r_j denote competing relational tendencies and Γ_t the mediating structure. A response can then transform not only the immediate state but the contradiction through which subsequent change unfolds. The relevant process is stated in Equation 3.

$$(\omega_t, C_t) \xrightarrow{u_t} (\omega_{t+1}, C_{t+1}). \quad (3)$$

Equation 3 records a second source of underdetermination. If relational tension participates in the generation of later structure, the fact that a deviation exists is insufficient by itself to determine how that

deviation should be addressed. Some tensions can threaten essential viability, produce severe harm, or close future possibilities quickly enough to make decisive response appropriate. The narrower analytical point is simply that the presence of tension and the choice of response are distinct questions.

A third central distinction concerns return and correction. A simple interpretation of non-forcing might suggest preserving the possibility of returning to the present state. That intuition is too narrow for historical relational systems. Exact return may be impossible because intervention, expectation, memory, institutional adaptation, and accumulated history alter the configuration even when a policy is formally reversed. The analysis separates three continuation questions. *Exact return* asks whether the earlier modeled configuration can become reachable again. *Functional recovery* asks whether selected functions or relations can be restored without reproducing the entire prior state. *Revisability* asks whether meaningful redirection remains available after a response has occurred. Exact return is often the most restrictive requirement, but the three relations are representation-dependent and should not be treated as a universal set-theoretic hierarchy. The distinction matters because a response can be historically irreversible while leaving substantial capacity for repair and future redirection. Conversely, a nominally reversible action can still entrench dependencies or expectations that make meaningful redirection difficult. The candidate *wuwei*-related intuition examined later in the paper is therefore a concern with avoiding unnecessary destruction of correction pathways when those pathways remain relevant to the declared task, rather than preservation of the status quo as such.

The phrase *unnecessary destruction* requires explicit qualification. No intrinsic value is assigned here to the present configuration, to a larger response repertoire, or to reversibility itself. A harmful or nonviable arrangement can make irreversible transformation appropriate; emergency protection can justify substantial commitment; and preserving additional options can impose costs on actors who bear the burden of keeping those options open. The predecessor paper likewise emphasizes that reachable-future expansion, reconfigurability, or dynamical efficacy does not by itself establish justice, legitimacy, legality, or political authorization (Huang 2026). For present purposes, non-forcing is treated as a conditional property relative to a separately declared response function, not as a complete normative criterion.

These distinctions support the paper’s central explanatory proposal. Let W_i denote a restricted proposition reconstructed from the philosophical discussion of *wuwei*, and let M_i denote a dynamical mechanism derived conditionally from the criticality framework. The inquiry does not assume a logical implication from a dynamical mechanism to a philosophical proposition. It asks whether a mechanism can increase the practical intelligibility of a restricted proposition under declared assumptions and contextual conditions. Equation 4 records that architecture.

$$(H_C, \mathcal{A}_i) \rightsquigarrow M_i \rightsquigarrow_{\chi_i} W_i, \quad (4)$$

where H_C denotes the relevant component of the Criticality Hypothesis, $\mathcal{A}_i$ the additional modeling assumptions required to construct mechanism M_i , and χ_i the conditions under which that mechanism is proposed to illuminate W_i . The first relation in Equation 4 denotes conditional mechanism construction rather than formal entailment; the second denotes explanatory correspondence rather than evidential confirmation. At most, a successful argument would establish that a separately motivated dynamical mechanism supplies a non-trivial reason why a restricted analytical proposition can have functional significance under specified conditions. Historical anticipation, theoretical identity, empirical validation of the broader philosophy, and normative authorization would remain further questions.

This explanatory posture also makes failure informative. A proposed correspondence weakens if the reconstructed *wuwei* proposition lacks adequate interpretive support, if the candidate mechanism depends on assumptions stronger than those declared, if the mechanism disappears under plausible neighboring models, if its scope fails to overlap the reconstructed proposition, or if the mechanism adds no explanatory content beyond a verbal restatement of the target intuition. Normative independence, by contrast, is expected rather than counted as failure: explanation and justification carry different burdens. This structure permits partial success. Some dimensions of *wuwei* may receive no criticality-based explanation, while some dynamical mechanisms may have implications that sit uneasily with familiar readings of non-forcing. The value of the comparison depends on preserving that possibility of mismatch.

The paper develops this inquiry in several steps. It first reconstructs a limited family of *wuwei*-related propositions without attempting a comprehensive interpretation of Daoist philosophy. It then restates only the parts of the Criticality Hypothesis needed for the explanatory task and specifies the cross-framework correspondence protocol. The central analytical sections examine configuration-sensitive responsiveness, relational tension and terminal openness, return and revisability, and a multidimensional forcing profile. The later sections compare the explanatory status of the four mechanisms, identify their failure conditions, and develop the methodological idea of explanatory reconstruction with retained remainder. The conclusion returns to the four restricted propositions and the boundary between dynamical explanation and normative or political authorization. Throughout, the intended contribution remains narrow: a possible contemporary mechanism for selected older intuitions, with their historical interpretation, empirical applicability, and normative standing assessed separately.

2 Restricted Wuwei-Related Governance Propositions

This section constructs the philosophical target used in the later dynamical analysis. The reconstruction is intentionally restricted: it identifies a small family of propositions related, with different degrees of proximity, to prominent interpretations of *wuwei* and assigns each proposition an explicit epistemic status. Political relevance is not introduced solely by the present comparison: the received *Laozi* is often read as addressing rulers and sociopolitical order, although that political dimension is embedded in a wider ethical and spiritual orientation (Chan 2025). Here *governance* functions as a modern analytical umbrella for questions of ruling, institutional response, and political order; it is not offered as a translation of *wuwei* or as evidence that the text formulates a modern governance theory. A comprehensive interpretation of Daoist philosophy, an exhaustive history of *wuwei*, and a direct derivation of contemporary doctrine lie outside the task. This separation matters because the later dynamical analysis is informative only if its philosophical target is specified independently enough to resist retrospective redescription.

2.1 Interpretive Restraint and Restricted Reconstruction

The literal expression commonly rendered as “nonaction” can invite an interpretation that is too narrow for the present inquiry. Slingerland’s account of early Chinese thought treats *wu-wei* as a broad ideal associated with effortless action, while his chapter on the *Laozi* emphasizes that even the text in which the language of “not-doing” is especially prominent should not be reduced to genuine passivity (Slingerland 2003a; Slingerland 2003b). Chan likewise notes that renderings such as non-assertive, non-coercive, and effortless action attempt to capture dimensions that the literal word “nonaction” can obscure, and explicitly distinguishes *wuwei* from total inactivity (Chan 2025). The received text is also interpretively plural, so these sources are used as constraints on the present reconstruction rather than as evidence of a uniquely recoverable authorial doctrine. They provide a sufficiently broad basis for asking whether action can remain active while differing from self-assertive or coercively directive intervention.

Accordingly, the formal propositions below are described as *wuwei-related* rather than as *the meaning of wuwei*. This wording matters. A proposition can be sufficiently consonant with a recognized dimension of the concept to serve as an explanatory target without being either a textual paraphrase or a complete philosophical definition. The restricted proposition family is stated in Equation 5.

$$\mathcal{W}^{\text{res}} = \{W_{\text{cfg}}, W_{\text{nf}}, W_{\text{open}}, W_{\text{rev}}\}. \quad (5)$$

Equation 5 contains four candidate propositions: configuration-sensitive response, restraint toward unnecessary forcing, openness of terminal form, and preservation of revisability. The superscript “res” denotes a restricted analytical reconstruction. It does not imply that these four propositions exhaust the textual, ethical, spiritual, political, or metaphysical content of *wuwei*.

The four propositions do not stand at the same interpretive distance. Non-forcing has the most direct motivation in the sources used here: Chan’s non-assertive and non-coercive renderings, together with Slingerland’s rejection of genuine passivity, support inquiry into forms of action that are active without

being reducible to assertive imposition (Slingerland 2003b; Chan 2025). Configuration sensitivity is one step more reconstructive. The cited literature connects *wuwei* with harmony, naturalness, and criticism of self-conscious or desire-driven striving, but it does not by itself establish the formal proposition that a governing response should vary with a modeled relational state. Terminal openness is a still looser abstraction concerning how fully a successor order is specified in advance. Revisability is the most explicit contemporary extension and is not attributed to the *Laozi* as a technical doctrine of reversibility. The later analysis accordingly treats these propositions as a graded reconstruction, with no presumption that they are four historical claims of equal standing.

This gradient of interpretive confidence is important. The paper accordingly distinguishes among three epistemic relations: a proposition can be *textually or interpretively supported*, *analytically reconstructed*, or *dynamically explained*. The three relations carry different burdens of support and should not be projected into one another. If revisability receives a useful criticality-based explanation, for example, that result would establish neither that classical authors possessed a concept of basin accessibility nor that the ancient concept anticipated modern dynamical-systems theory. It would show only that a contemporary mechanism can illuminate one restricted proposition whose relation to the non-forcing theme has been argued separately and remains open to criticism.

2.2 Passivity, Restraint, Responsiveness, and Non-Forcing

A second source of confusion is the tendency to collapse several distinct modes of response into one continuum running from “doing nothing” to “doing a lot.” The present paper requires a more differentiated vocabulary because the later dynamical analysis concerns how an intervention enters a relational field, not simply how much visible activity accompanies it.

Definition 2.1 (Passivity). Passivity denotes the absence of an intentional response by the focal governing actor over a declared interval and relative to a declared disturbance or decision problem.

Definition 2.1 is intentionally local. A governing actor can be passive with respect to one disturbance while remaining highly active elsewhere. Passivity is compatible with continuing change in the surrounding system: endogenous interaction, other actors, exogenous forcing, or accumulated dynamics can still transform the relational configuration.

Definition 2.2 (Restraint). Restraint denotes an intentional limitation placed on the scope, intensity, duration, commitment depth, or continuation of a response relative to one or more available alternatives.

Restraint, in this vocabulary, is an action characteristic rather than the absence of action. A government that imposes a temporary protective measure while deliberately limiting its duration or exit barriers can be exercising restraint. Conversely, refraining from an intervention because no capacity exists to act would be passivity or incapacity rather than restraint in the present sense.

Definition 2.3 (Responsiveness). Responsiveness denotes the generation or revision of a response as a function of the evolving relational configuration, the disturbance under consideration, realized history, and the conditions governing later correction or adaptation.

Definition 2.3 corresponds to the schematic architecture in Equation 2. Responsiveness can coexist with strong, difficult-to-reverse, centralized, or coercive measures when those features are independently warranted by the response problem. A decisive action can be responsive when it is conditioned by the actual configuration and remains open to revision when relevant conditions change. Likewise, a formally minimal intervention can be unresponsive when it is mechanically repeated despite substantial changes in the relation into which it enters.

Definition 2.4 (Non-forcing, preliminary). Non-forcing denotes a relational property of response in which the intervention avoids additional trajectory-shaping, closure, or entrenchment that is not required by the declared response function under the model being used.

Definition 2.4 is preliminary because the later sections will decompose forcing into several dimensions. Its main purpose here is to separate non-forcing from low magnitude. If two responses provide the same declared protective function, one can be less forcing because it preserves more capacity for later correction even when its immediate material scale is larger. Conversely, a small declaration, rule change, or commitment can be highly forcing when it closes future pathways disproportionately to its immediate magnitude.

The distinctions are summarized in Table 1. The table is analytical rather than hierarchical; none of the modes is treated as intrinsically superior.

These distinctions already reveal why a simple “less intervention” interpretation is inadequate. Passivity can allow severe deterioration; restraint can be inappropriate when a short response window requires decisive protection; responsiveness can demand a large intervention; and non-forcing can sometimes require active buffering precisely to prevent an evolving disturbance from collapsing later options. The paper consequently treats *wuwei*-related governance as a possible orientation toward the generation and revision of action, with intervention quantity left as a separate dimension.

2.3 Configuration-Sensitive Response

The first candidate proposition in Equation 5 concerns the relation between action and the configuration it enters.

Claim 2.5 (Restricted configuration-sensitivity proposition). For the purposes of this paper, a *wuwei*-related mode of governance can be reconstructed as one in which the form and continuation of response remain sensitive to the relational configuration, with deviation from a prior template treated as one possible input rather than the sole generator of action.

Claim 2.5 is an analytical reconstruction rather than a textual paraphrase, and its interpretive motivation is indirect. The cited literature distinguishes *wuwei* from total inactivity and associates it with effortless, non-assertive, or non-coercive action, naturalness, and the absence of certain forms of self-conscious striving (Slingerland 2003a; Slingerland 2003b; Chan 2025). The present paper asks whether configuration sensitivity can serve as one contemporary operationalization of that reduced imposition. This additional step requires its own dynamical argument; it should not be read back into the classical material. The reconstruction remains compatible with rule-governed institutions. A stable rule can itself respond to recurring conditions and can protect fairness or limit arbitrary intervention. Configuration sensitivity here concerns whether declared changes in relational conditions enter the generation or revision of response; it carries no presumption that formal rules or prior commitments should disappear.

The proposition can be contrasted with a response rule that is invariant under changes the model regards as materially relevant. Let ρ denote a response generator, and let $\chi : \Omega \rightarrow X$ be a declared response-relevant readout. Consider two configurations $\omega, \omega' \in \Omega$ for which $\chi(\omega) \neq \chi(\omega')$. A configuration-insensitive rule over that declared difference would nevertheless satisfy Equation 6.

$$\rho(\omega, \eta, H, \mathcal{R}, \mathcal{A}) = \rho(\omega', \eta, H, \mathcal{R}, \mathcal{A}). \quad (6)$$

Equation 6 is a contrast case, not a definition of poor governance. Invariance across contextual differences can be desirable when those differences are irrelevant to the task. Its analytical role is narrower: when the modeled consequences of an intervention vary materially across configurations, configuration information can become relevant to response generation. The later criticality analysis asks whether near-critical conditions make that relevance more consequential.

2.4 Restraint toward Unnecessary Forcing

The second candidate proposition concerns force in the dynamical rather than merely physical or administrative sense.

Table 1: Analytical distinctions among passivity, restraint, responsiveness, and non-forcing.

Mode	Structural question	What the concept does not imply
Passivity	Does the focal actor intentionally respond to the declared disturbance during the interval?	Stability, neutrality, or absence of change in the surrounding system.
Restraint	Is an available response intentionally bounded in scope, intensity, duration, or commitment?	Inactivity, weakness, or normative superiority.
Responsiveness	Is the response generated or revised in relation to the evolving configuration and history?	Low intervention magnitude or absence of targets.
Non-forcing	Does the response avoid additional closure or entrenchment beyond what the declared function requires?	Preservation of the status quo or universal reversibility.

Claim 2.6 (Restricted non-forcing proposition). A *wuwei*-related mode of governance can be reconstructed as resisting additional trajectory closure, structural entrenchment, or reduction of later correction capacity when those effects exceed what is required by the declared response function together with independently specified constraints.

Claim 2.6 preserves two qualifications that are easy to lose. First, *unnecessary* is used here as a task-indexed shorthand: it refers to structural effects that are not required by the declared response function or by constraints specified independently of the forcing comparison. The term carries no free-standing judgment about which function or constraint is politically justified. Protective action, legal settlement, emergency commitment, and institution-building can intentionally close possibilities when closure belongs to those independently supplied requirements. Second, the claim is relational: the comparison depends on the response function, the feasible alternatives, the relevant horizon, and the representation of later correction pathways.

This qualification also prevents the reconstruction from becoming a doctrine of universal softness. If a severe and rapidly propagating disturbance can be contained only by a decisive intervention, the relevant comparison is not between decisive action and an imaginary costless alternative. It is among feasible responses that satisfy the declared protective requirement. A large intervention can therefore belong to the non-dominated response set developed later when every less committal alternative fails the required function.

The philosophical claim made here is accordingly modest. Interpretations of *wuwei* as non-assertive or non-coercive action provide a recognizable starting point for investigating non-forcing (Chan 2025). They do not establish the paper’s technical criterion. The decomposition of forcing into trajectory closure, recoverability loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment is a modern analytical construction, not a historical claim about the vocabulary of the *Laozi*.

2.5 Open-Ended Transformation

The third proposition concerns how much terminal form a response needs to specify in advance.

Claim 2.7 (Restricted open-endedness proposition). As a contemporary extension of the restricted reconstruction, a *wuwei*-related mode of governance can be modeled as allowing some dimensions of a future configuration to remain underdetermined when the immediate response function can be satisfied without fixing the complete terminal form in advance.

Claim 2.7 does not claim that the classical material contains a doctrine of terminal underdetermination, and it does not reject planning. Most governance requires objectives, constraints, legal mandates, thresholds, or protected functions. The proposition instead separates specifying what must be protected

from specifying the complete form of what must eventually emerge. A response can, for example, protect continued viability, communication, or recoverability while leaving some subsequent institutional or relational configuration open to later development.

The proposition is analytically useful because a target can be partial. Let V denote a declared protected property or function and let $\Omega_V \subseteq \Omega$ denote the family of configurations satisfying it. A response need not identify one unique ω^* if the relevant task and independently specified constraints are satisfied by more than one terminal configuration. This distinction is represented in Equation 7.

$$\omega_{t+1} \in \Omega_V \quad \text{without requiring} \quad \omega_{t+1} = \omega^*. \quad (7)$$

Equation 7 makes a limited structural claim: a response function can be defined by an admissible region when several terminal configurations satisfy the declared requirement and external constraints. Multiplicity alone supplies no preference for openness. A further argument must show that additional pre-specification would remove possibilities included in the declared adaptation, learning, or correction criteria while serving no requirement already represented in the comparison. The later dynamical analysis asks whether historically evolving dynamics can supply such an additional mechanism under specified conditions.

2.6 Revisability as a Contemporary Extension

The fourth proposition is the least direct historically and therefore requires a particularly explicit caveat. The paper does not claim that the classical material invoked here articulates a formal doctrine of reversibility, reachable-state geometry, or option preservation. Revisability is introduced as a contemporary analytical extension that may help explain one way in which non-forcing can be operationalized in historical relational systems.

Claim 2.8 (Restricted revisability proposition). Within the present reconstruction, a *wuwei*-related response can be described as revisability-preserving when it addresses the declared present function while avoiding destruction of declared correction, recovery, or redirection pathways beyond what that function and independently specified constraints require.

Claim 2.8 does not assign intrinsic value to returning to the present state. A current arrangement may itself be harmful, unjust, unstable, or unsustainable. The relevant object is the capacity for correction after intervention, not the indefinite preservation of the status quo. The paper therefore distinguishes the three continuation questions introduced in Section 1 and formalized in Section 7. Exact return asks for restoration of the earlier modeled configuration. Functional recovery permits irreversible history while restoring selected functions. Revisability asks whether meaningful redirection remains possible even when exact return or full functional restoration is unavailable. Their relation depends on the declared representation, recovery functions, and continuation classes rather than a universal nesting rule.

This reconstruction also differs from maximizing option count. More options are not automatically better, and some harmful pathways should be closed. Revisability concerns the preservation of correction capacity relative to the purposes and constraints of the decision. It can therefore coexist with intentional commitment. A response may close one family of trajectories while remaining revisable with respect to another dimension that matters for later learning or repair.

The contemporary status of this proposition should remain visible throughout the paper. The explanatory question is not whether the *Laozi* “predicted” reversibility theory. It is whether, once non-forcing is reconstructed as sensitivity to unnecessary structural imposition, contemporary dynamical concepts such as recoverability and reachable-future contraction provide a useful explanation of why revisability can be one concrete property of non-forcing under some conditions.

2.7 Scope of the Restricted Concept

The four propositions can now be summarized with their status in Table 2. The status column is intentionally asymmetric because the paper should not pretend that every later formal object has equal historical

support.

Several stronger readings fall outside the restricted concept. *Wuwei governance*, as used here, carries no commitment to laissez-faire, minimal government, generalized non-intervention, automatic deference to the strongest current tendency, unconditional preservation of existing institutions, or abstention from coercive capacity when its use is independently justified. Endogenous processes can be harmful, unresolved tensions can become dangerous, and a larger future-option set can impose serious costs. Any broader conclusion on those matters would require additional empirical and normative argument.

The resulting object remains intentionally thinner than a philosophy of governance. It is a family of response orientations that can later be compared with the dynamical consequences of conditional near-criticality. The next section will restate the minimum criticality concepts required for that explanatory comparison and will keep the predecessor paper's stronger endogenous, restorative, turbulence, and historical-transition hypotheses analytically separate unless a later argument specifically requires them.

Table 2: Restricted *wuwei*-related propositions and their epistemic status in this paper.

Proposition	Restricted content	Status in the present paper
W_{cfg}	Response remains sensitive to the relational configuration rather than being generated solely by a fixed external template.	Analytical reconstruction with indirect interpretive motivation.
W_{nf}	Response avoids unnecessary additional forcing beyond the declared functional requirement.	Closest interpretive motivation; technical forcing dimensions are contemporary.
W_{open}	Some terminal dimensions can remain open when the required function does not demand a unique final configuration.	Contemporary extension with comparatively weak direct interpretive support.
W_{rev}	Response avoids unnecessary destruction of return, recovery, or redirection pathways.	Explicit contemporary extension, not attributed as a technical classical doctrine.

3 Criticality as the Explanatory Background

This section states the minimum dynamical background needed for the later explanatory comparison. The predecessor *Criticality Hypothesis of International Politics* contains claims of different strength: a minimal proposal about possible regime structure, stronger proposals concerning endogenous maintenance and restorative feedback, and downstream extensions involving turbulence-like dynamics and historical transition. The present argument uses the minimal layer by default and invokes stronger mechanisms only where they are separately identified. Keeping that hierarchy explicit limits the risk that the reconstruction of *wuwei* silently inherits claims that the criticality framework itself leaves unresolved (Huang 2026).

3.1 A Minimal Near-Critical Regime

The predecessor paper provisionally characterizes political near-criticality through three jointly relevant properties: comparative susceptibility to relational perturbation, capacity for collective reconfiguration, and sufficient persistence for configurations and perturbations to remain systemically consequential. It therefore excludes a simple identification of criticality with volatility, crisis, conflict, or disorder (Huang 2026). The Minimal Criticality Hypothesis then proposes that international politics may, at an appropriate relational scale and under some conditions, exhibit a regime combining elevated susceptibility, multiscale reconfiguration, incomplete confinement to a single effective attractor, and historically consequential organization (Huang 2026).

For the present explanatory purpose, these properties can be collected into a non-scalar profile. Let Σ denote the relational scale or family of scales at which the system is represented, and let H denote the time horizon relevant to the response problem. The background profile is defined in Equation 8.

$$\mathfrak{C}_t^{\min}(\Sigma, H) = (P_t(\Sigma, H), S_t(\Sigma, H), G_t(\Sigma, H)), \quad (8)$$

where P_t denotes represented structural persistence, S_t susceptibility to perturbation, and G_t reconfigurability over the declared scale and horizon. Equation 8 is a bookkeeping device rather than a criticality index. The three components need not be commensurable and should not be collapsed into one scalar unless an application independently justifies the aggregation. The profile serves the present paper because a restricted *wuwei* proposition is potentially interesting only when action enters a field that is structured enough for interventions to have persistent consequences yet susceptible enough for the manner of intervention to alter subsequent possibilities.

The minimal hypothesis also remains comparative. Elevated susceptibility means elevated relative to neighboring regimes or relevant counterfactual configurations, not an observer-independent threshold applying to every political system. Reconfigurability is likewise conditional on the state representation,

admissible disturbances, institutional constraints, and time horizon. Persistence does not mean equilibrium or stasis; it means that relational structure survives long enough for trajectories and perturbations to have interpretable consequences. These qualifications are inherited rather than added ad hoc in the present paper (Huang 2026).

The explanatory significance of Equation 8 is correspondingly narrow. Very low susceptibility would reduce the scope for intervention style to generate materially different trajectories, while very low persistence would make those differences difficult to carry forward as stable relational consequences. The candidate region therefore combines enough susceptibility for interventions to matter with enough persistence for their consequences to remain interpretable over the relevant horizon. Reconfigurability adds a third condition: more than one consequential continuation must remain dynamically accessible for distinctions involving openness or revisability to have substantive content. None of these properties carries a normative ranking by itself.

This joint profile also marks the specifically criticality-related increment in the argument. State dependence, nonlinearity, path dependence, and adaptation can arise far from criticality. The present paper attributes explanatory work specifically to conditional near-criticality only when the coexistence of elevated susceptibility, organized persistence, and continuing reconfigurability changes the salience or consequences of the mechanism under study. Where an explanation survives unchanged without that joint regime structure, it should be described as a dynamical explanation rather than a criticality-specific one.

3.2 State-Dependent Perturbation Response

The second inherited element concerns state dependence. The predecessor treats international politics as a historically evolving relational system rather than a fixed object receiving exogenous shocks. A perturbation therefore has no context-free political meaning. Its effect depends on the configuration into which it enters, the couplings active at that time, the historical path through which those couplings formed, and the scale at which the response is observed (Huang 2026).

A generic response map can be written as Equation 9.

$$\Phi_{t,H} : \Omega \times \mathcal{E} \longrightarrow \mathcal{T}_H, \quad (\omega_t, \eta_t) \longmapsto \tau_{t:t+H}, \quad (9)$$

where Ω is the represented relational configuration space, $\mathcal{E}$ a declared perturbation family, and $\mathcal{T}_H$ the family of trajectories considered over horizon H . Equation 9 does not presume differentiability, linearity, or a fixed autonomous law. Its only analytical commitment is that the consequence of a perturbation is evaluated through the trajectory generated from the actual relational configuration rather than from the perturbation label alone.

This permits a pair of configurations to be response-divergent under a nominally similar perturbation. Equation 10 states the pairwise condition.

$$\omega_t \neq \omega'_t, \quad \Phi_{t,H}(\omega_t, \eta) \neq \Phi_{t,H}(\omega'_t, \eta). \quad (10)$$

Equation 10 states a possibility rather than a universal inequality. Its immediate implication is limited: a response rule may require configuration information when the same nominal intervention has materially different consequences across states. That result is a generic feature of state-dependent dynamics. It becomes relevant to the present cross-framework inquiry only after two additional steps are supplied: the restricted *wuwei*-related proposition must independently concern configuration-sensitive response, and the near-critical profile must make the omitted configuration information materially consequential over the declared horizon. Those steps are developed later rather than assumed here.

The predecessor adds another distinction that is central to the present project: the immediate direction of an action need not determine its later systemic function. A locally counter-directional perturbation can, under some conditions, preserve alternative couplings or alter later accessibility, while an apparently stabilizing action can contribute to deeper lock-in. Conversely, a perturbation that appears heterogeneous or oppositional can fail to generate any durable alternative at all (Huang 2026). For this inquiry, the

paper treats *relational significance* as trajectory-relative rather than inferring it directly from the visible direction or magnitude of an event.

For this purpose, let Π denote a declared trajectory readout that extracts the system-level property relevant to the explanatory question. The systemic response signature is defined in Equation 11.

$$\mathcal{G}_{t,H}^{\Pi}(\omega_t, \eta_t) = \Pi(\Phi_{t,H}(\omega_t, \eta_t)). \quad (11)$$

Equation 11 makes explicit that the same observed perturbation can be assigned different dynamical significance depending on the trajectory property under study. The readout can concern persistence, recoverability, coupling change, accessible response paths, or another declared feature. No normative evaluation follows from the signature itself.

3.3 Effective Response Repertoire and Reachable Futures

The third inherited element concerns the difference between raw variation and effective response diversity. The predecessor paper uses the idea of an effective response repertoire to avoid treating either rigid order or unstructured variation as equivalent to adaptive capacity. A rigid regime can preserve coherence while allowing few distinguishable consequential responses. A highly disorganized regime can display extensive variation while lacking enough continuity for responses to persist, propagate, or become institutionally consequential. The relevant possibility is an intermediate regime in which differentiation and coherence coexist sufficiently for several responses to remain dynamically accessible and systemically meaningful (Huang 2026).

The present paper does not require a scalar measure of repertoire size. Let $\mathcal{E}_{t,H}^{\text{eff}}$ denote the family of responses that are distinguishable under the chosen representation and remain sufficiently coherent to affect the later relational trajectory. The notation is summarized in Equation 12.

$$\mathcal{E}_{t,H}^{\text{eff}} = \{e : e \text{ is dynamically distinguishable and consequential over } H\}. \quad (12)$$

Equation 12 deliberately leaves the empirical test application-specific. Consequentiality can depend on persistence, propagation, institutional uptake, coupling effects, or another declared criterion. The analytical point is that an effective repertoire is neither the number of conceivable actions nor the number of instantaneous microstates. It is a family of responses that remain usable in the sense relevant to the system-level dynamics.

Reachable futures provide the corresponding state-space perspective. The predecessor defines a reachable relational future as a configuration attainable from the present configuration through at least one admissible trajectory within a specified horizon, scale, disturbance or intervention bound, and constraint set. Reachability does not imply probability, desirability, intention, or prediction (Huang 2026). The present paper uses the generic reachable set in Equation 13.

$$\text{Reach}_{t,H}^{\mathcal{U}}(\omega_t) = \{\omega' : \omega_t \rightsquigarrow_{\mathcal{U},H} \omega'\}, \quad (13)$$

where $\mathcal{U}$ records the declared family of admissible disturbances, interventions, institutional updates, or other transition-generating operations. Equation 13 is representation-relative and horizon-relative. An apparently closed trajectory family can reopen after rule change, while a currently broad response set can contract after commitment or lock-in. The predecessor therefore also distinguishes first-order movement within an existing transition structure from second-order changes that modify the transition structure itself (Huang 2026).

This distinction is directly relevant to the restricted revisability proposition introduced in Section 2. Revisability need not mean preserving every element of $\text{Reach}_{t,H}^{\mathcal{U}}(\omega_t)$, and a larger reachable set is not automatically better. The explanatory question is narrower: when several responses satisfy a declared immediate function, can differences among them be partly explained by how they alter the later availability of meaningful correction or redirection pathways? The criticality framework supplies a language for posing that question; it does not answer the normative comparison by itself.

The predecessor’s Reachable-Futures Hypothesis is stronger than what the present paper requires. That hypothesis asks whether sustained or recurrent near-critical dynamics may, for some systems, be associated with slower contraction, greater reopening, or greater regeneration of effective reachable futures than neighboring deeply locked-in regimes, provided that susceptibility remains compatible with sufficient coherence (Huang 2026). The current argument can remain valid even if that broader comparative hypothesis fails. It needs only the weaker proposition that interventions can differ in how they transform reachability and revisability under a given configuration.

3.4 Nested Hypotheses and Explanatory Restraint

The predecessor paper distinguishes three principal levels of the criticality hypothesis. The Minimal Criticality Hypothesis concerns possible regime structure. The Endogenous Criticality Hypothesis asks whether heterogeneous adaptive interactions can generate or maintain near-criticality. The Restorative Criticality Hypothesis adds the still stronger possibility that deepening lock-in can, under some conditions, induce diversification, redundancy, counter-coupling, or related responses that partially restore reconfigurability. The predecessor explicitly rejects an inferential slide from the minimal to the endogenous hypothesis or from the endogenous to the restorative hypothesis (Huang 2026). Their logical separation is summarized in Equation 14.

$$H_C^{\min} \not\Rightarrow H_C^{\text{end}}, \quad H_C^{\text{end}} \not\Rightarrow H_C^{\text{rest}}. \quad (14)$$

Equation 14 is methodological rather than mathematical. It records that evidence or argument supporting one level does not by itself establish the stronger level. Political turbulence and turbulence-mediated historical transition are further downstream extensions and are likewise not logical consequences of near-criticality (Huang 2026).

Table 3 states how those layers are treated in the present paper. The table is important because several possible explanations of *wuwei* would become stronger if restorative or turbulence mechanisms were assumed, but relying on them too early would make the philosophical argument hostage to hypotheses that the predecessor deliberately leaves open.

The normative boundary is equally important. The predecessor explicitly states that preserving reconfigurability or preventing lock-in does not by itself establish that an intervention is legitimate, lawful, just, or politically authorized (Huang 2026). The same boundary applies here. Even if a response can be shown to preserve revisability, maintain a broader effective repertoire, or reduce trajectory closure, those properties supply at most dynamical information. They do not establish that the response should be chosen.

The explanatory inheritance of this section can therefore be summarized narrowly. The criticality framework supplies four resources for the later comparison with *wuwei*: configuration-dependent response, coexistence of persistence and susceptibility, a distinction between raw variation and effective response repertoire, and a representation-relative account of reachable futures. None of these entails non-intervention, minimal government, automatic preservation of contradiction, or a general preference for openness. Their role is to explain why the manner in which a response enters an evolving relational field can matter independently of how large the response appears. The next section will use this background to define the conditions under which a dynamical mechanism can count as a possible explanation of a restricted philosophical intuition without collapsing the two frameworks into one another.

Table 3: Criticality concepts inherited by the present explanatory inquiry.

Inherited element	Role in the predecessor framework	Status in the present paper
Minimal near-criticality	Possible coexistence of persistence, elevated susceptibility, and substantial reconfigurability.	Required conditional background.
State-dependent perturbation response	The effect and systemic function of a perturbation depend on relational configuration, history, scale, and trajectory.	Required explanatory mechanism.
Effective response repertoire	Differentiated responses matter only when enough coherence remains for them to become consequential.	Used where responsiveness concerns endogenous response capacity.
Reachable futures	Future accessibility is conditional on representation, horizon, constraints, and admissible transition-generating operations.	Required for later analysis of revisability.
Endogenous criticality	Adaptive heterogeneous interactions may generate or maintain near-criticality.	Optional stronger extension; not assumed by default.
Restorative criticality	Lock-in can under some conditions induce counter-responses that partially restore reconfigurability.	Optional stronger extension; never treated as established.
Political turbulence and historical transition	Amplification, recurrent cascade interaction, attractor escape, and transition-structure change.	Downstream research programmes; unnecessary for the core explanation.

4 Explanatory Correspondence across Frameworks

Sections 2 and 3 prepared two analytically distinct objects: a restricted family of *wuwei*-related propositions and a conditional dynamical framework. This section specifies the relation to be tested between them. Its objective is to separate possible explanation from conceptual resemblance, empirical evidence, theoretical reduction, and normative justification. The discussion defines explanatory correspondence, states conditions for an informative comparison, and identifies findings that would weaken or suspend a proposed correspondence.

4.1 Independent Reconstruction and Explanatory Direction

The argument becomes circular if the dynamical mechanism is reconstructed from *wuwei* and then presented as an independent explanation of *wuwei*. The two sides should therefore be specified before the explanatory relation is asserted. Let $W_i \in \mathcal{W}^{\text{res}}$ denote one restricted philosophical proposition from Section 2, and let M_j denote a dynamical mechanism derived from a declared criticality model or hypothesis. The two objects belong to different descriptive vocabularies. W_i concerns a philosophical orientation toward action, while M_j concerns relations among states, perturbations, couplings, reachability, recovery, or response repertoires.

The paper uses the term *independent reconstruction* for the requirement that the content of W_i be defensible from the philosophical sources and interpretive literature without relying on M_j , while the content of M_j be defensible from the dynamical framework without relying on W_i . The requirement is represented schematically in Equation 15.

$$\begin{array}{ll} \mathcal{S}_{\text{phil}} \rightsquigarrow W_i, & \text{before asserting} \\ \mathcal{S}_{\text{dyn}} \rightsquigarrow M_j, & M_j \rightsquigarrow W_i. \end{array} \quad (15)$$

In Equation 15, $\mathcal{S}_{\text{phil}}$ denotes the relevant philosophical source and interpretive basis, while $\mathcal{S}_{\text{dyn}}$ denotes the declared dynamical assumptions, definitions, and predecessor hypotheses. The symbol $\rightsquigarrow$ records reconstruction within a framework; $\rightsquigarrow$ will be reserved for the weaker cross-framework explanatory relation defined below. The notation does not imply formal derivability in either source tradition.

Independent reconstruction serves two purposes. First, it reduces the risk of reading modern concepts backward into the classical material. The present paper does not claim that the *Laozi* contains attractor theory, nonlinear susceptibility, state-space reachability, or an implicit theory of critical transitions. Second, it prevents the dynamical framework from being tailored so closely to the philosophical conclusion that the subsequent correspondence becomes tautological. The Criticality Hypothesis is inherited because it was developed as a separate research programme with its own empirical obligations and failure conditions (Huang 2026).

The direction of explanation also requires explicit assumptions. The paper asks whether a mechanism M_j can make a restricted proposition W_i more intelligible under stated conditions; it does not use W_i to explain why a criticality mechanism occurs. Equation 16 therefore includes the auxiliary assumptions required to construct the mechanism.

$$(H_C, \mathcal{A}_j) \rightsquigarrow M_j \rightsquigarrow_{\chi} W_i, \quad (16)$$

where H_C denotes the relevant conditional criticality hypothesis, $\mathcal{A}_j$ the model-specific assumptions needed to obtain M_j , and χ the contextual conditions under which the mechanism is proposed to illuminate the philosophical proposition. The first relation in Equation 16 is a conditional construction relation; it carries no claim that M_j follows from criticality alone. The second relation is explanatory rather than deductive or evidential.

4.2 A Restricted Relation of Explanatory Correspondence

The paper requires a relation stronger than verbal similarity but weaker than logical implication. Two statements can resemble one another while differing in causal structure, scope, or practical meaning. Conversely, a mechanism can help explain a philosophical intuition even when the vocabularies are not isomorphic. The relevant relation is therefore defined in terms of explanatory work rather than lexical overlap.

Definition 4.1 (Conditional explanatory correspondence). Let W_i be a restricted philosophical proposition and M_j a dynamical mechanism. Write $M_j \rightsquigarrow_{\chi} W_i$ when, under declared conditions χ , the mechanism supplies a non-trivial account of how or why the practical pattern represented by W_i could arise or become intelligible, while neither theoretical identity nor empirical confirmation of W_i is inferred.

Definition 4.1 contains four restrictions. The correspondence is *conditional*: a mechanism can explain an intuition only over a specified range of configurations. It is *mechanistic or structural*: the correspondence should identify a relation among dynamical properties rather than merely repeat the philosophical proposition in technical vocabulary. It is *non-reductive*: successful explanation does not show that the philosophical concept means the dynamical mechanism. Finally, it is *non-evidential*: the existence of a plausible mechanism does not establish that the philosophical proposition is empirically true in a target domain.

Three relations need to remain separate. Let $\sim_{\text{con}}$ denote conceptual consonance and $\rightsquigarrow_{\chi}$ conditional explanatory correspondence. Let $A_i(D)$ denote an empirical application claim that the practical pattern represented by W_i is operative, effective, or otherwise instantiated in domain D , and let $E \models A_i(D)$ denote evidential support for that claim. Equation 17 records the resulting non-implications.

$$M_j \sim_{\text{con}} W_i \not\Rightarrow M_j \rightsquigarrow_{\chi} W_i \not\Rightarrow E \models A_i(D). \quad (17)$$

The first non-implication in Equation 17 records that resemblance is too weak. Phrases such as “yielding,” “balance,” “spontaneity,” or “adaptation” can be made to resemble many modern theories unless a mechanism is specified. The second records a separate evidential burden: even a coherent mechanism does not show that the target pattern is instantiated or effective in a particular political domain.

Normative justification is a further relation again. Let $J(W_i)$ denote a claim that the orientation represented by W_i is normatively justified in some governance context. The relation in Equation 18 states the boundary.

$$M_j \rightsquigarrow_\chi W_i \not\equiv J(W_i). \quad (18)$$

Equation 18 is especially important because some dynamical properties can be instrumentally useful while remaining normatively objectionable, and some normatively required interventions can be dynamically forceful. The paper therefore does not use explanatory correspondence to authorize a political choice.

4.3 Conditions for an Informative Correspondence

The relation in Definition 4.1 is intentionally demanding. Without additional conditions, almost any old philosophical statement could be associated retrospectively with some modern model. The present paper therefore uses six criteria for an informative explanatory correspondence.

The first is *independent specification*, already stated in Equation 15. The philosophical proposition and the mechanism should be reconstructed without presupposing the desired correspondence. The second is *mechanism relevance*: the dynamical mechanism should make a difference to the practical intelligibility of the proposition. If W_i would be equally well explained whether M_j holds or fails, the mechanism adds little explanatory content.

The third is *scope matching*. The conditions under which M_j operates should overlap the conditions under which the paper claims explanatory relevance. A mechanism associated with near-critical susceptibility cannot explain a general doctrine valid independently of regime structure unless a further argument is supplied. Let $\text{Dom}(M_j)$ denote the domain in which the mechanism is represented as operative and $\text{Scope}(W_i)$ the scope for which the explanatory claim is made. A minimum scope condition is given in Equation 19.

$$\chi \subseteq \text{Dom}(M_j) \cap \text{Scope}(W_i). \quad (19)$$

Equation 19 does not require the two domains to be identical. It requires only that the explanatory claim be confined to their defensible overlap. This is why the present paper speaks of responsiveness *near criticality* rather than of a universal scientific account of *wuwei*.

The fourth criterion is *criticality-specific increment*. When a proposed mechanism also occurs in ordinary nonlinear, adaptive, or path-dependent systems, the analysis should identify what conditional near-criticality adds. The relevant increment may be greater susceptibility, stronger persistence of intervention effects, wider reconfigurability, or a change in how rapidly correction pathways open or close. If no such increment can be defended, the mechanism may still support a dynamical explanation, but the explanation should not be attributed specifically to criticality.

The fifth criterion is *contrastive content*. A useful explanation should indicate what would be different if the proposed mechanism were absent or if a neighboring dynamical regime obtained instead. For example, a mechanism based on elevated state-dependent susceptibility should imply a different reason for preserving revisability than a regime in which response is approximately linear, weakly path-dependent, and cheaply reversible. The contrast need not establish that one regime is normatively superior; it makes the explanatory contribution testable at the conceptual level.

The sixth criterion is *failure visibility*. The paper should state observations, model results, or interpretive findings that would weaken the proposed correspondence. A relation that can absorb every possible outcome has little explanatory value. Table 4 summarizes the criteria.

These criteria cannot establish that an explanation is correct. They serve as procedural constraints against retrospective analogy, scope inflation, and attributing generic dynamical effects to criticality without identifying an additional regime-specific contribution. The actual explanatory correspondences will be evaluated later proposition by proposition.

Table 4: Criteria for a disciplined cross-framework explanatory correspondence.

Criterion	Requirement	Characteristic failure
Independent specification	Reconstruct W_i and M_j from their respective source frameworks before asserting correspondence.	Modern theory is read backward into the classical concept, or the mechanism is designed to restate the desired conclusion.
Mechanism relevance	M_j should explain how or why the pattern represented by W_i can arise or become intelligible.	The relation remains metaphorical or lexical.
Scope matching	Restrict the explanatory claim to conditions where both the dynamical mechanism and the reconstructed proposition are applicable.	A local mechanism is generalized into a universal philosophy.
Criticality-specific increment	Identify what conditional near-criticality contributes beyond generic nonlinearity, adaptation, or path dependence.	A generic dynamical mechanism is relabeled as a consequence of criticality without additional explanatory work.
Contrastive content	State how the explanation differs under neighboring regimes or when the mechanism is absent.	The explanation makes no discriminating difference.
Failure visibility	Identify empirical, formal, or interpretive findings that would weaken the correspondence.	Every outcome is redescribed as compatible with the explanation.

4.4 Framework Distinction and Explanatory Remainders

An informative correspondence can remain partial. For bookkeeping, let $\mathcal{M}(W_i)$ denote the aspects of a reconstructed proposition that receive a dynamical explanation from the present framework and let $\mathcal{R}(W_i)$ denote the explanatory remainder. These labels need not form a mathematically disjoint or exhaustive partition; they mark the boundary of the mechanism being claimed. A dynamical account of one practical dimension of *wuwei* can therefore leave ethical, spiritual, linguistic, cosmological, phenomenological, and historical dimensions outside its explanatory scope.

The same limit applies in the opposite direction. The criticality framework contains concepts for which there may be no useful *wuwei* correspondence. Susceptibility profiles, bifurcation mechanisms, cascade statistics, and empirical indicators should not be assigned Daoist analogues merely to complete a conceptual mapping. A sparse correspondence can be more informative than a total translation.

Framework distinction has a further consequence. Two frameworks can converge on a practical orientation for different reasons. An interpretation grounded in classical material may motivate non-assertive action through an account of naturalness, cultivation, desire, or the relation between the sage and the Dao; a dynamical argument may identify state-dependent susceptibility and path-dependent closure as reasons why unnecessary forcing can be costly. The practical orientations can overlap even when their ontologies and justificatory structures remain different.

Remark 4.2 (Explanatory convergence without theoretical merger). Cross-framework convergence in this paper means that independently reconstructed arguments can illuminate a similar practical pattern. It does not imply that one framework was an early version of the other, that they share a common ontology, or that agreement at one level transfers to neighboring claims.

Remark 4.2 mirrors the predecessor paper’s question-transfer discipline: transfer should occur at the level actually justified, rather than by assuming that similarity at one level authorizes mechanism or ontology at another (Huang 2026).

4.5 A Correspondence Matrix for the Present Inquiry

The preceding definitions can now be applied to the four restricted propositions in $\mathcal{W}^{\text{res}}$. At this stage the mappings remain candidate explanations rather than established results. Let $\mathcal{M}_C$ denote the family of criticality-based mechanisms available from Section 3. The paper will later examine the candidate relation in Equation 20.

$$\mathfrak{X}_C = \{(M_j, W_i, \chi_{ji}) : M_j \in \mathcal{M}_C, W_i \in \mathcal{W}^{\text{res}}, M_j \rightsquigarrow_{\chi_{ji}} W_i\}. \quad (20)$$

Equation 20 is a research object rather than a conclusion. The later sections will ask which triples can be defended and which should be rejected or weakened. Table 5 gives the initial candidate matrix.

The table also makes visible where the paper may fail. If the state-dependent mechanism adds nothing to W_{cfg} , if forcing cannot be distinguished from mere intervention magnitude, if openness of terminal form depends on stronger restorative assumptions than the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis supplies, or if revisability cannot be operationalized without embedding the normative conclusion in the definition, the corresponding explanatory relation should be weakened or abandoned.

The principal contribution of this section is therefore not a claim that the correspondence has already been established. It is an inference architecture for testing such a claim. The remainder of the paper can now ask substantive questions without moving ambiguously among resemblance, explanation, evidence, and justification. The next section will begin that analysis by distinguishing responsiveness from target-directed control and asking when configuration-sensitive response has a genuine dynamical rationale under near-critical conditions.

Table 5: Initial candidate correspondences between restricted *wuwei* propositions and criticality-based mechanisms. Entries are questions to be evaluated, not established equivalences.

Restricted proposition	Candidate dynamical mechanism	Explanatory question
Configuration-sensitive response W_{cfg}	State-dependent perturbation effects and changing coupling structure.	Can nonlinear configuration dependence explain why invariant target-imposition is sometimes dynamically brittle?
Restraint toward unnecessary forcing W_{nf}	Elevated susceptibility, path dependence, and intervention-induced changes to later response structure.	Can dynamical leverage explain why response magnitude and structural forcing should be distinguished?
Openness of terminal form W_{open}	Effective response repertoire and second-order changes in transition structure.	Can endogenous reconfiguration explain why useful action need not always specify a complete terminal state in advance?
Preservation of revisability W_{rev}	Representation-relative reachability, recovery, and intervention-induced closure of future pathways.	Can changing reachability explain why avoiding unnecessary closure can have a dynamical rationale distinct from preserving the status quo?

5 Responsiveness and Directional Control

This section tests the first candidate correspondence in Table 5: whether state-dependent dynamics can help explain the restricted proposition W_{cfg} , in which the generation or revision of response remains sensitive to the relational configuration it enters. The comparison is deliberately ideal-typical. Planning, regulation, diplomacy, and control can incorporate extensive feedback and contextual information. The narrower question is whether target-relative discrepancy becomes an incomplete descriptor when nominally similar actions have materially different effects across configurations, histories, or susceptibility regimes.

5.1 Target Direction as an Analytical Ideal Type

The target-control architecture introduced in Equation 1 can be refined without assuming a metric state space. Let Ω denote the represented relational configuration space, let Ω^* denote a declared family of target configurations or target conditions, and let $\mathcal{D}^*$ be a codomain for target-relative discrepancy. A target-discrepancy map is defined in Equation 21.

$$\Delta^* : \Omega \times \Omega^* \longrightarrow \mathcal{D}^*. \quad (21)$$

Equation 21 need not be numerical. It can encode categorical deviation, violated constraints, directional mismatch, or another application-specific relation between the current configuration and a target condition. A target-directed response rule can then be represented schematically by Equation 22.

$$u_t = \pi_t(\omega_t, \Delta^*(\omega_t, \omega^*)). \quad (22)$$

Equation 22 represents a family of governance logics in which a substantial part of response direction is generated by the relation between present configuration and declared target. The rule can still contain feedback, adaptation, and local state information; the equation is therefore not a caricature of control theory. Its purpose is to isolate one feature for comparison: the target relation plays a privileged role in determining what counts as correction.

This architecture can be entirely appropriate when the target is well specified, the relevant system response is sufficiently stable, intervention effects are comparatively predictable over the decision horizon, and correction costs remain manageable. A fire-suppression system, a narrow logistical target, or a bounded technical control problem can often be structured around an explicit desired condition without

creating the philosophical problem addressed in this paper. The relevant contrast is therefore between response descriptions of different informational sufficiency, not between “control” and “good governance.” Target direction can remain useful while becoming incomplete under some relational regimes.

5.2 Configuration-Dependent Response Effects

Let $\mathcal{U}$ denote a declared family of intentional responses and $\mathcal{E}$ the perturbation family introduced in Section 3. The effect of an intentional response can be incorporated into the trajectory map by Equation 23.

$$\Psi_{t,H} : \Omega \times \mathcal{U} \times \mathcal{E} \longrightarrow \mathcal{T}_H, \quad (\omega_t, u_t, \eta_t) \longmapsto \tau_{t:t+H}^{(u)}. \quad (23)$$

Equation 23 is intentionally generic. It permits the response u_t to change the immediate configuration, the couplings through which later perturbations propagate, institutional constraints, or another part of the represented transition structure. A trajectory readout Π then gives the response-effect signature in Equation 24.

$$\mathcal{Y}_{t,H}^{\Pi}(\omega_t, u_t, \eta_t) = \Pi(\Psi_{t,H}(\omega_t, u_t, \eta_t)). \quad (24)$$

The configuration-sensitive problem appears when the same nominal response has different signatures across configurations. A configuration pair (ω, ω') is response-divergent for (u, η, Π, H) when Equation 25 holds.

$$\mathcal{Y}_{t,H}^{\Pi}(\omega, u, \eta) \neq \mathcal{Y}_{t,H}^{\Pi}(\omega', u, \eta). \quad (25)$$

Equation 25 does not state that every configuration pair diverges or that near-criticality is required for divergence. State dependence is common in nonlinear and adaptive systems. The relevance of the Criticality Hypothesis is narrower: a near-critical regime can make such divergence more consequential because susceptibility, path dependence, or changing accessibility can increase the importance of where the intervention enters the relational field (Huang 2026).

The target relation can therefore be insufficient even when it is correctly measured. Suppose two configurations have the same target-discrepancy descriptor but generate different system-level consequences under the same selected response. The structure is stated in Equation 26.

$$\Delta^*(\omega, \omega^*) = \Delta^*(\omega', \omega^*), \quad \mathcal{Y}_{t,H}^{\Pi}(\omega, u, \eta) \neq \mathcal{Y}_{t,H}^{\Pi}(\omega', u, \eta). \quad (26)$$

Proposition 5.1 (Target-discrepancy insufficiency under configuration-dependent response). *If Equation 26 holds for a declared readout Π , then target discrepancy alone is insufficient to determine the response-effect signature for that pair of configurations under the represented response and perturbation.*

Proof. The two configurations have the same target-discrepancy value by the first condition in Equation 26. If that value alone determined the response-effect signature, the corresponding signatures would coincide. The second condition states that they do not. Therefore additional configuration information is required for the represented effect. $\square$

Proposition 5.1 is an informational result internal to the representation. Under the stated conditions, target-relative discrepancy alone does not determine the represented intervention effect. Performance comparisons between target-directed and more configuration-sensitive rules require additional assumptions about information quality, decision costs, objectives, and robustness. The proposition therefore supplies only the first step in a possible explanation of W_{cfg} .

5.3 Responsive Generation of Action

A responsive rule supplements target-relative information with the evolving properties of the relational field. Let $\mathcal{J}_t$ denote the response-relevant information state defined in Equation 27.

$$\mathcal{J}_t = (\omega_t, \eta_t, H_t, \mathfrak{C}_t^{\min}, \mathcal{R}_t, \mathcal{A}_t), \quad (27)$$

where $\mathfrak{C}_t^{\min}$ is the conditional near-criticality profile from Equation 8, $\mathcal{R}_t$ records the recovery or revisability information relevant to the decision problem, and $\mathcal{A}_t$ records the declared available-response family. A responsive rule is then written in Equation 28.

$$u_t = \rho_t(\mathcal{J}_t; \omega^*), \quad (28)$$

where the semicolon in Equation 28 indicates that a target condition may remain present without exhausting the information used to generate the response. Responsiveness therefore does not require abandoning goals. It changes the role of the target from a complete generator of direction toward one input among several response-relevant conditions.

This distinction is especially important in a historical relational system. A response can improve one target-relative readout while changing the later transition structure in ways that matter for subsequent governance. A target may be approached while recoverability contracts; a short-run deviation may increase while a damaging amplification pathway is buffered; or an intervention can satisfy an immediate protective objective while leaving several future corrections available. A response rule that records only contemporaneous target discrepancy can miss these differences even when the target itself remains normatively or operationally relevant.

Figure 1 illustrates the ideal-typical contrast. The figure does not rank the two architectures. It shows that the responsive architecture conditions action on a wider relational record while permitting a target condition to remain among its inputs.

5.4 Responsiveness, Delay, and Overreaction

Configuration sensitivity does not imply that every observed change should trigger a distinct intervention. A governance system can become less responsive by reacting too frequently as well as by reacting too rigidly. If observation noise, transient fluctuation, and persistent structural change are not distinguished, a response rule can amplify noise through its own adjustments. The present paper treats responsiveness as the capacity to revise action when changes cross a declared decision threshold or otherwise enter the stated response criterion; maximum reaction frequency is not implied.

Let Π_{dec} denote the decision-relevant readout and let ϵ represent a change in the observed field. In the present representation, a responsive architecture can include a region of observational variation within which the selected response need not change. One schematic representation is given in Equation 29.

$$\Pi_{\text{dec}}(\mathcal{J}_t) \sim \Pi_{\text{dec}}(\mathcal{J}'_t) \implies \rho_t(\mathcal{J}_t; \omega^*) = \rho_t(\mathcal{J}'_t; \omega^*), \quad (29)$$

where $\sim$ denotes an application-defined equivalence relation representing changes that are not decision-relevant for the response under consideration. Equation 29 does not require literal policy invariance under every small perturbation. It states that responsiveness needs a criterion of relevance; otherwise “respond to conditions” degenerates into compulsive reaction.

The opposite problem is excessive delay. Near a sensitive transition, the cost of waiting can increase when recovery corridors close, commitment windows contract, or cascades classified as adverse under the declared protection criteria become self-reinforcing. In this account, responsiveness includes temporal judgment: neither immediate forcing nor indefinite observation follows from the concept. This point is important for the explanatory project because a caricature of *wuwei* as waiting or non-action would be dynamically indefensible. A configuration-sensitive response can be decisive when the relational field makes delay more consequential than action.

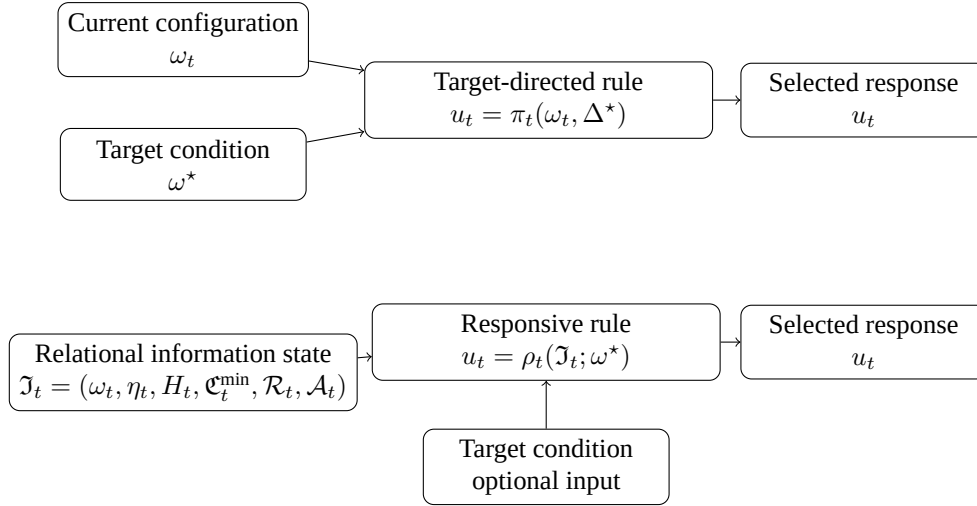


Figure 1: Ideal-typical distinction between target-directed and configuration-sensitive response generation. The responsive architecture can retain target conditions while conditioning action on history, perturbation, susceptibility, recovery, and available-response information. The figure is schematic and does not imply that one architecture is universally preferable.

5.5 Configuration-Sensitivity Explanatory Correspondence

The preceding analysis now permits a limited evaluation of the first candidate relation in Table 5. Let M_{cfg} denote the mechanism consisting of material configuration dependence in response effects, as represented by Equations 25 and 26. Let χ_{cfg} denote the conditions under which that dependence is empirically or formally non-negligible for the decision horizon. The candidate correspondence is stated in Equation 30.

$$M_{\text{cfg}} \rightsquigarrow_{\chi_{\text{cfg}}} W_{\text{cfg}}. \quad (30)$$

Equation 30 is defensible only in the explanatory sense developed in Section 4. It says that material state dependence can provide a contemporary mechanism explaining why configuration-sensitive response may sometimes be practically intelligible. It does not show that historical Daoist authors reasoned in terms of nonlinear state dependence, that responsive governance is always more effective, or that the mechanism supplies normative justification for a particular response.

The correspondence also has visible failure conditions. It weakens when the relevant response relation is approximately invariant across configurations, when the target discrepancy already captures the state variables needed to predict the effect, when the system is sufficiently stable that configuration-dependent differences are negligible over the decision horizon, or when the response problem is deliberately narrow enough that later structural effects fall outside its legitimate scope. In such settings, target-directed control can remain adequate and may perform better under the declared criteria.

Hypothesis 5.2 (Configuration-sensitivity explanation of responsive action). When intervention effects are materially state-dependent over the relevant horizon, and when a target-relative descriptor does not by itself determine the response-effect signature, configuration-sensitive response has a dynamical rationale that is absent or weaker in neighboring regimes where response effects are approximately invariant. Under those conditions, the mechanism provides a possible explanation for the restricted proposition W_{cfg} without establishing the broader validity of *wuwei*.

Hypothesis 5.2 is the first substantive candidate correspondence tested in the paper, and its scope remains deliberately narrow. It explains one reason why responsiveness can matter; it does not yet explain non-forcing, openness of terminal form, or revisability. The next section turns to relational tension and transformation, where the question changes from how a response depends on the present configuration to how response can alter the structure through which subsequent contradictions and possibilities develop.

6 Relational Tension and Dynamical Transformation

This section develops a restricted dialectical component of the analysis. The object of interest is a class of situations in which opposed relational tendencies are jointly embedded in an evolving structure, so that intervention can change both their local balance and the structure through which later tensions arise. Hegelian dialectic offers a comparative reminder that opposition can participate in transformation rather than functioning only as an error to be removed (Maybee 2020). The use made of that comparison is limited to this structural possibility; Hegel’s logical system, a necessary progression toward synthesis, and a teleological direction of political development are not imported into the model, nor is Daoist thought identified with Hegelian dialectics.

6.1 Relational Tension as an Analytical Object

The word *contradiction* can be misleading if it is read as a claim that two formally inconsistent propositions are simultaneously true. The object required here is weaker. A *relational tension* is a represented configuration in which two or more tendencies place mutually constraining demands on a common relational structure, so that their continued interaction can alter the conditions under which either tendency is realized. Let $r_t^{(1)}$ and $r_t^{(2)}$ denote two such tendencies and let Γ_t denote the mediating relational structure. The tension record is defined in Equation 31.

$$C_t = \left(r_t^{(1)}, r_t^{(2)}, \Gamma_t \right). \quad (31)$$

Equation 31 is intentionally abstract. The tendencies can concern competing resource requirements, incompatible institutional constraints, divergent response directions, or another pair of relational pressures represented at the chosen analytical scale. The record does not imply that the two tendencies are normatively equal, that their opposition is beneficial, or that their coexistence should be prolonged. It states only that the response problem cannot be fully characterized by reading either tendency in isolation from the structure that mediates them.

A tension can therefore change in at least three analytically distinct ways. One tendency can be suppressed or removed; the mediating structure can be altered while both tendencies remain; or the interaction can generate a successor configuration in which the earlier opposition is no longer represented in the same form. These possibilities are summarized by the tension-transition map in Equation 32.

$$\mathcal{T}_C : (\omega_t, C_t, u_t) \mapsto (\omega_{t+1}, C_{t+1}). \quad (32)$$

Equation 32 emphasizes that an intentional response u_t can change the relational tension itself. The later object C_{t+1} need not contain the same tendencies or the same mediating structure as C_t . This is the minimum sense in which the present paper uses *dynamical transformation*: response can alter the field through which later response problems are generated.

6.2 Resolution and Transformation

A useful distinction can now be drawn between *resolution-directed* and *transformation-sensitive* response. The distinction concerns the information retained about future structure, not the moral character of the action. Let $\mathcal{C}^*$ denote a declared class of tension states counted as resolved for a particular task. A response u is resolution-directed relative to $\mathcal{C}^*$ when its response criterion is organized primarily around reaching that class. One schematic form is given in Equation 33.

$$u_t = \pi_t^{\mathcal{C}}(C_t, \mathcal{C}^*). \quad (33)$$

Equation 33 is not objectionable by construction. Some decision problems include independently specified constraints that require rapid resolution, and some tasks define a deliberately narrow resolved condition. The analytical limitation appears when reaching $\mathcal{C}^*$ can occur through materially different

transformations of Γ_t or of the later response structure, and those differences matter for subsequent action.

A transformation-sensitive rule therefore conditions response on the possible successor structures generated by alternative interventions. Let $\mathfrak{S}_t(u)$ denote a declared set or profile of successor tension structures reachable under response u over horizon H . The corresponding rule is represented in Equation 34.

$$u_t = \rho_t^C(C_t, \{\mathfrak{S}_t(v)\}_{v \in \mathcal{U}_t}, \mathcal{V}_t), \quad (34)$$

where $\mathcal{V}_t$ records application-specific viability, protection, or admissibility constraints. Equation 34 leaves room for decisive resolution. Its additional requirement is that the decision can take account of what kind of relational structure the resolution produces, rather than treating all routes into $\mathcal{C}^*$ as dynamically equivalent.

The distinction becomes formally relevant when two responses both satisfy the declared resolution condition but generate different successor structures. Suppose u and v satisfy Equation 35.

$$C_{t+1}^{(u)} \in \mathcal{C}^*, \quad C_{t+1}^{(v)} \in \mathcal{C}^*, \quad \mathfrak{S}_t(u) \neq \mathfrak{S}_t(v). \quad (35)$$

Proposition 6.1 (Resolution equivalence does not imply transformation equivalence). *If Equation 35 holds, then equivalence with respect to the declared resolution class $\mathcal{C}^*$ does not determine equivalence of successor tension structure under the representation $\mathfrak{S}_t$.*

Proof. Both responses enter the declared resolution class by the first two conditions of Equation 35. The third condition states that their successor-structure profiles differ. Therefore equality with respect to the resolution criterion is insufficient to determine equality with respect to the transformation criterion. $\square$

Proposition 6.1 is internal to the representation. It does not show that the difference between $\mathfrak{S}_t(u)$ and $\mathfrak{S}_t(v)$ is normatively important. It establishes only that a model of tension resolution can lose dynamical information when it records whether a tension has been resolved but not how the response changes the conditions of later interaction.

6.3 Near-Critical Sensitivity of Tension Transformation

The Criticality Hypothesis adds a conditional reason to care about this distinction. The predecessor paper proposes that some international-political configurations may combine organized persistence with elevated susceptibility and continuing reconfigurability (Huang 2026). Under such conditions, an intervention into a relational tension can have consequences that are disproportionate to the immediate local change because it modifies couplings, transition accessibility, or the persistence of later configurations.

Let $\mathcal{G}_t$ denote the represented transition structure governing the propagation of later perturbations. An intervention can then be represented as producing both an immediate tension transition and a transition-structure update, as in Equation 36.

$$(\omega_t, C_t, \mathcal{G}_t) \xrightarrow{u_t} (\omega_{t+1}, C_{t+1}, \mathcal{G}_{t+1}^{(u)}). \quad (36)$$

Equation 36 makes the second-order consequence explicit. A response can reduce an immediate tension while altering the structure through which later perturbations, claims, or institutional adjustments are processed. Near criticality does not guarantee that these structural effects are large, but the hypothesis supplies a regime in which elevated susceptibility makes their possible importance analytically salient.

The resulting problem is not that contradiction should be preserved. It is that the sign and magnitude of a local reduction in tension can be insufficient to characterize the longer-run response. A response that quickly reduces the selected tension readout can also narrow later correction pathways; another response can tolerate a temporarily larger local tension while changing Γ_t in a way that reduces recurrence or improves later adjustment. Which response is preferable remains an empirical and normative question.

Figure 2 illustrates the distinction among direct suppression, directional resolution, and structural transformation. The branches are conceptual possibilities, not a ranking of governance strategies.

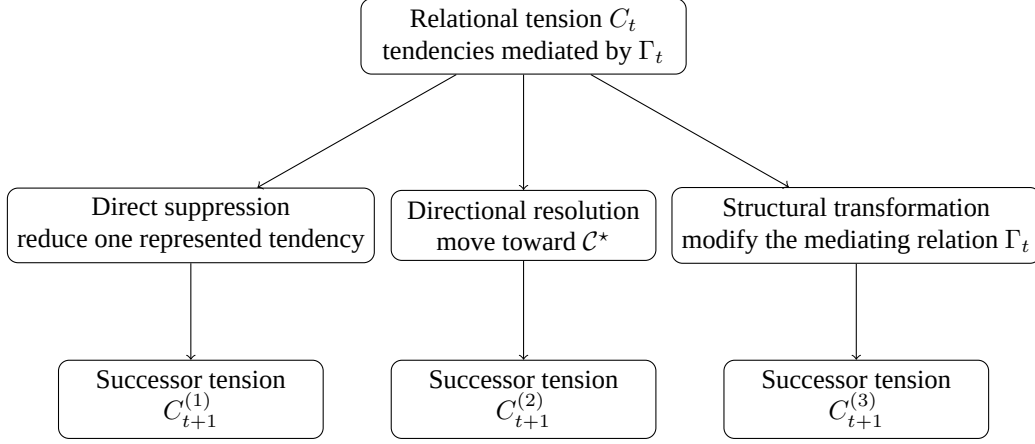


Figure 2: Illustrative response pathways for a relational tension. The three branches differ in what they target, but none is assigned general priority. Each produces a successor tension structure that can condition later response.

6.4 Terminal Openness and the Transformation of Tension

The dialectical component now permits a more precise interpretation of W_{open} , the restricted proposition that effective response need not fully specify the final relational form in advance. The proposition should not be read as a preference for indeterminacy. It concerns settings in which the successor structure depends partly on transformations that cannot be fully specified before the present tension has evolved.

Let $\mathcal{U}_t^{\text{adm}} \subseteq \mathcal{U}_t$ denote a declared family of responses satisfying the task and side constraints supplied to the model. Their substantive legitimacy is not determined by the dynamical representation. For each $u \in \mathcal{U}_t^{\text{adm}}$, let $\mathfrak{S}_t(u)$ denote its represented successor-structure profile. Terminal openness becomes analytically relevant when several such responses satisfy the immediate requirement while leaving successor structures that are distinguishable under a declared continuation criterion. This condition is stated in Equation 37.

$$\exists u, v \in \mathcal{U}_t^{\text{adm}} \text{ such that } \nu_t(u) \in \mathcal{V}_t, \quad \nu_t(v) \in \mathcal{V}_t, \quad \mathfrak{S}_t(u) \neq \mathfrak{S}_t(v), \quad (37)$$

where ν_t is an application-specific readout of the immediate protected requirement. Equation 37 establishes only that present protection fails to identify a unique successor structure. That underdetermination is insufficient by itself to justify terminal openness: one successor could still be independently preferable on legal, ethical, empirical, or robustness grounds. A dynamical rationale for retaining openness requires an additional condition, namely that current information and declared criteria do not yet warrant a unique terminal commitment and that pre-specification would itself remove successor possibilities relevant to later adaptation, learning, or correction.

This yields the paper's second substantive candidate correspondence. Let M_{tr} denote the mechanism in which current response transforms the mediating relation and thereby alters later tension structure, and let χ_{tr} denote the conditions under which those successor differences alter at least one continuation criterion declared for the relevant horizon. The correspondence is stated in Equation 38.

$$M_{\text{tr}} \rightsquigarrow_{\chi_{\text{tr}}} W_{\text{open}}. \quad (38)$$

Equation 38 proposes a possible dynamical explanation for terminal openness under a demanding conjunction of conditions. The relational field must be transformable through response; more than one successor structure must satisfy the independently supplied task and side constraints; current evidence and declared comparison criteria must fail to select a unique terminal structure; and additional pre-specification must remove adaptation, learning, or correction possibilities included in those criteria. Under that conjunction, complete terminal commitment adds structure that is not supplied by the

immediate requirement or the declared comparison rule. The relation weakens when an external legal, protective, coordination, or evidential criterion selects one terminal structure, when delay violates a specified constraint, or when the admissible response family effectively contains one pathway.

Hypothesis 6.2 (Tension-transformation explanation of terminal openness). When response changes the represented relation in ways that produce distinguishable successor structures, more than one successor remains admissible under independently supplied constraints, current evidence and declared criteria do not select a unique terminal form, and additional pre-specification removes continuation possibilities included in the comparison, the mechanism supplies a candidate explanation for why terminal openness can matter. A specifically criticality-based version of that explanation requires the further showing that the near-critical profile increases the persistence, reach, or consequence of those successor differences relative to an appropriate non-critical baseline. The value of unresolved tension remains a separate question.

Hypothesis 6.2 is intentionally non-teleological. It does not predict that contradiction will generate progress, synthesis, or a superior order. It also does not claim that a governing actor should remain neutral among harmful and non-harmful trajectories. The explanatory point is narrower: if later possibilities are partly generated through the unfolding response process, and if present criteria do not yet justify one terminal form, then resistance to premature pre-specification can have a contemporary dynamical rationale.

The next section turns from openness of terminal form to the stronger question of revisability. Once an intervention has changed the relational field, which return, recovery, and redirection pathways remain available, and when does their deliberate preservation become a meaningful form of non-forcing?

7 Revisability, Recovery, and Return

This section develops the most fully specified candidate bridge between the restricted reconstruction of *wuwei* and the dynamical language inherited from the Criticality Hypothesis. The relevant intuition concerns the correction structure left after intervention. In historically evolving systems, literal restoration can fail once expectations, institutions, knowledge, and relations have changed, which makes exact reversibility too demanding as a default analytical standard. The narrower question is whether an intervention can address the present problem while avoiding avoidable destruction of pathways for later correction, recovery, or redirection. The predecessor paper distinguishes political revisability from exact reversibility and defines revisability as an effective capacity to alter, exit, recombine, or revise an established relational configuration through feasible future trajectories (Huang 2026). Building on that distinction, this section separates exact return, functional recovery, and revisability before asking when loss of those capacities is attributable to the response itself.

7.1 Three Distinct Continuation Questions

Let an intentional response u transform the current relational configuration ω_t into $\omega_{t_u}^{(u)}$, where $t_u \geq t$ is the time at which the represented response has been implemented to the degree relevant for later analysis. Let $T > t_u$ be a declared terminal horizon and let $\mathcal{U}_{[s,T]}$ denote the family of admissible future updates represented between time s and T . The reachable set from configuration ω over that interval is defined in Equation 39.

$$\text{Reach}_{s \rightarrow T}(\omega; \mathcal{U}_{[s,T]}) = \{\omega' : \omega \rightsquigarrow \omega' \text{ through an admissible update history in } \mathcal{U}_{[s,T]}\}. \quad (39)$$

Equation 39 is representation-relative. It depends on which state variables are retained, which future updates are treated as admissible, which resources and institutions are represented, and the declared horizon. It carries the same methodological caution as the reachable-futures construction in the predecessor paper: reachability is neither probability nor desirability (Huang 2026).

The most demanding notion of return asks whether the earlier represented configuration itself remains reachable after the response. Exact return over the declared horizon is stated in Equation 40.

$$\omega_t \in \text{Reach}_{t_u \rightarrow T} \left(\omega_{t_u}^{(u)}; \mathcal{U}_{[t_u, T]} \right). \quad (40)$$

Equation 40 is intentionally demanding. Even where a formal policy can be reversed, the earlier relational configuration may be unrecoverable because information, expectations, commitments, institutional dependencies, or material conditions have changed during implementation. Exact return is useful as a limiting case, not as the default standard of responsive action.

A weaker question concerns recovery of selected functions or relational properties. Let $\Pi_F : \Omega \rightarrow Y_F$ be a declared functional readout containing the properties that an application intends to recover. Functional recovery is available after response u when Equation 41 holds.

$$\exists \omega' \in \text{Reach}_{t_u \rightarrow T} \left(\omega_{t_u}^{(u)}; \mathcal{U}_{[t_u, T]} \right) \quad \text{such that} \quad \Pi_F(\omega') = \Pi_F(\omega_t). \quad (41)$$

Equation 41 allows the later configuration to differ historically and structurally from ω_t while restoring the declared functional signature. The choice of Π_F is substantive. Recovery of one function can coexist with loss of another, and no readout should be treated as an observer-independent definition of social restoration.

Revisability asks a different question. Let $\mathfrak{C}_t = \{C_0, C_1, \dots, C_m\}$ be a declared family of continuation classes distinguished by criteria specified for the analysis, with C_0 containing the represented continuation of the post-response arrangement under ordinary reproduction. The redirection set after response u is defined in Equation 42.

$$\text{Redir}_{t_u, T}(u; \mathfrak{C}_t) = \left\{ C_\alpha \in \mathfrak{C}_t \setminus \{C_0\} : C_\alpha \cap \text{Reach}_{t_u \rightarrow T} \left(\omega_{t_u}^{(u)}; \mathcal{U}_{[t_u, T]} \right) \neq \emptyset \right\}. \quad (42)$$

The post-response configuration is revisable relative to $(\mathfrak{C}_t, T, \mathcal{U}_{[t_u, T]})$ when the set in Equation 42 is nonempty. This definition requires only that at least one redirection into a declared distinct continuation class remains feasible. It does not require return to the earlier state, restoration of the earlier functional profile, or preservation of every alternative. In this sense, revisability is a capacity of the transformed present rather than a promise to restore the past.

Figure 3 illustrates the three questions. They are related but should not be arranged as a universal hierarchy.

The distinctions in Figure 3 prevent a common inferential shortcut. Exact return implies functional recovery only when the readout Π_F is defined on the same representation and preserves the relevant equality, but functional recovery need not imply broader revisability. A system can restore one selected function and then become deeply locked into the recovered arrangement. Conversely, a historically irreversible system can remain revisable relative to the declared continuation classes because several distinct redirections remain feasible. The predecessor paper makes the same non-restorationist point in its distinction between political revisability and reversibility (Huang 2026).

Proposition 7.1 (Independence of recovery and broader revisability). *Under Definitions 41 and 42, functional recovery does not in general imply revisability, and revisability does not in general imply functional recovery.*

Proof. Functional recovery requires the existence of a reachable configuration matching the declared functional readout, while revisability requires the existence of a reachable configuration in at least one declared distinct continuation class. The first condition can hold when the only reachable continuation restores the selected function but leaves no alternative class accessible. The second can hold when an alternative continuation is reachable but no reachable configuration reproduces the selected earlier functional readout. Therefore neither condition entails the other without additional assumptions linking the readout and continuation classes. $\square$

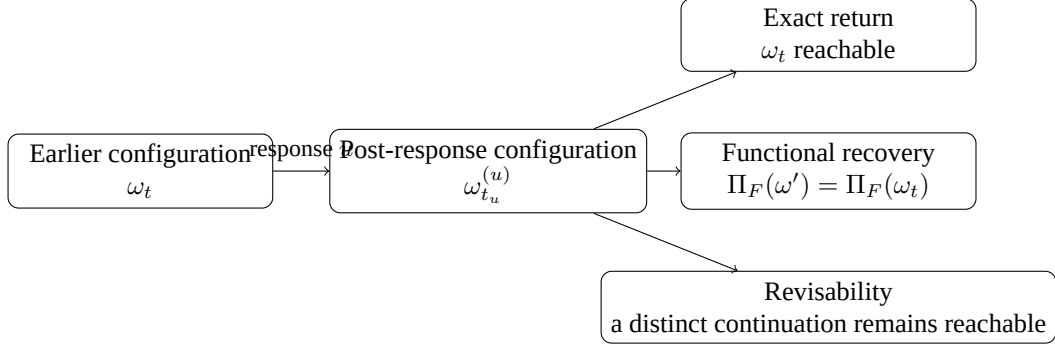


Figure 3: Three distinct post-response questions. Exact return asks for restoration of the earlier represented configuration; functional recovery asks for restoration of a declared readout; revisability asks whether redirection into a declared distinct continuation class remains feasible. None of the three is treated as a universal normative requirement.

Proposition 7.1 matters for the present inquiry because the present reconstruction keeps non-forcing distinct from restorationism. Revisability can remain analytically relevant even when recreation of the earlier state is infeasible or excluded by independently supplied criteria.

7.2 Response-Induced Closure

The next question concerns what the response itself removes from later reachability. To compare interventions without confusing closure with the ordinary passage of time, fix a common terminal horizon T and a common family of continuation classes $\mathfrak{C}_t$. Let the pre-response alternative set be defined in Equation 43.

$$\mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{\text{pre}} = \{C_\alpha \in \mathfrak{C}_t : C_\alpha \cap \text{Reach}_{t \rightarrow T}(\omega_t; \mathcal{U}_{[t,T]}) \neq \emptyset\}. \quad (43)$$

For response u , define the post-response continuation set in Equation 44.

$$\mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{(u)} = \{C_\alpha \in \mathfrak{C}_t : C_\alpha \cap \text{Reach}_{t_u \rightarrow T}(\omega_{t_u}^{(u)}; \mathcal{U}_{[t_u,T]}) \neq \emptyset\}. \quad (44)$$

The represented closure footprint of u is then the set difference in Equation 45.

$$\text{Close}_{t,T}(u) = \mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{\text{pre}} \setminus \mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{(u)}. \quad (45)$$

Equation 45 does not say that every lost continuation was desirable, probable, or worth preserving. It measures only which declared continuation classes were represented as reachable before the response and are no longer represented as reachable afterward. The footprint can arise from the intervention itself, from the resources consumed while implementing it, from changes in coupling or rules, or from delay that allows some response windows to close. Empirical application would have to distinguish these mechanisms rather than attributing every difference to intentional action.

The word *unnecessary* can now be given a local analytical meaning without pretending to settle a political value question. Let $\mathcal{P}_t$ be a declared immediate task projection together with the side constraints included in the comparison, and let $\mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}}$ denote the represented feasible responses that satisfy it. Membership in $\mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}}$ establishes comparability only on that declared projection; it does not imply overall equivalence in cost, distribution, legality, robustness, or other omitted dimensions. A response $u \in \mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}}$ exhibits *avoidable closure relative to* $(\mathcal{P}_t, \mathfrak{C}_t, T)$ when there exists another response $v \in \mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}}$ satisfying Equation 46.

$$\text{Close}_{t,T}(v) \subsetneq \text{Close}_{t,T}(u). \quad (46)$$

Equation 46 does not establish that v should be chosen. The two responses can differ in cost, distribution, legality, timing, robustness, or other dimensions omitted from the closure representation. It supplies only a disciplined sense in which u closes strictly more of the declared future set while failing to achieve a stronger result on the particular immediate requirement used for the comparison.

This distinction is useful for the present reconstruction of non-forcing. If two interventions satisfy the same declared task projection, but one eliminates strictly more of the correction pathways represented in the comparison and no countervailing criterion has been included that accounts for that loss, the additional closure becomes a candidate instance of forcing in the dynamical sense developed here. The claim remains conditional on the adequacy of the task projection, side constraints, and represented continuation classes.

7.3 Near-Criticality and Revisability Mechanisms

Near-criticality supplies a possible mechanism through which response-induced closure can become especially consequential. Under the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis, some configurations may combine organized persistence with elevated susceptibility and continuing reconfigurability (Huang 2026). A response that changes couplings, basin accessibility, or the effective response repertoire can therefore alter not merely the immediate state but the family of later corrections that remain dynamically realizable.

The point can be stated without claiming that criticality uniquely generates revisability. The predecessor paper explicitly notes that revisability can also arise through institutional design, redundancy, modularity, legal revision procedures, distributed authority, and other mechanisms (Huang 2026). The present explanation is narrower: where near-critical susceptibility makes small or moderate interventions capable of reorganizing later transition structure, preserving some correction pathways can have a stronger dynamical rationale than it would under a regime in which interventions have approximately invariant and easily reversible effects.

This also clarifies why intervention magnitude is an unreliable proxy for revisability. A small intervention can close a strategically important continuation class if it changes a key coupling, authorization rule, or path-dependent commitment. A large intervention can preserve substantial later redirection when it is temporary, modular, reversible in implementation, or accompanied by explicit recovery pathways. The relevant question concerns what the action did to the structure of later feasible correction, not how little action occurred.

The candidate explanatory relation can now be stated in Equation 47.

$$M_{\text{rev}} \rightsquigarrow_{\chi_{\text{rev}}} W_{\text{rev}}, \quad (47)$$

where M_{rev} denotes the mechanism by which state-dependent intervention can close return, recovery, or redirection pathways, and χ_{rev} denotes the conditions under which those pathways enter the declared correction criterion and are not already excluded by the task or side constraints.

Hypothesis 7.2 (Revisability-preservation explanation). When intervention effects vary with the represented state, more than one declared correction or redirection class is reachable before action, later correction is included in the comparison criteria, and alternative responses satisfy the same task projection while producing different closure footprints, unequal closure can supply discriminating content for a candidate explanation of W_{rev} . Calling that explanation specifically criticality-based additionally requires evidence that the near-critical profile changes the persistence, reach, or consequence of pathway closure relative to an appropriate baseline. The claim does not imply preservation of the current state or a general objection to irreversible commitment.

Hypothesis 7.2 is among the more fully specified correspondences developed so far, while remaining deliberately defeasible. It weakens when the represented feasible set contains only one response, when delay violates a declared protective constraint, when the retained pathway is inaccessible in practice, or when omitted costs and distributional effects alter the comparison once represented. In such cases the

closure relation may remain descriptively correct while losing the explanatory contrast required for the correspondence.

The resulting interpretation of W_{rev} is neither conservative nor restorationist. It does not ask governance to preserve the present configuration at all costs. It asks whether a present response closes more of the future correction structure than its declared task requires. That question prepares the next section, which turns from revisability to the broader concept of forcing and asks how closure, recoverability loss, response-repertoire contraction, and structural entrenchment can be represented together without reducing them to one scalar measure.

8 Forcing and Dynamical Footprints

This section develops the restricted proposition W_{nf} through a multidimensional account of dynamical forcing. Its central distinction separates intervention magnitude from the later structural footprint of response. A small act in expenditure, legal scope, duration, or visible intensity can close consequential future pathways, while a larger intervention can remain temporary, modular, recoverable, and comparatively open to later redirection. The analytical question asks whether responses satisfying the same declared task differ in trajectory closure, recoverability loss, repertoire contraction, or structural entrenchment. These dimensions are retained as a profile because the present framework supplies no principled universal scalar aggregation.

8.1 Intervention Magnitude and Structural Consequence

Let $\mathcal{U}_t$ denote the declared family of intentional responses available at time t . Equation 48 represents intervention magnitude through an application-specific descriptor.

$$\mu_t : \mathcal{U}_t \longrightarrow \mathcal{M}_t, \quad (48)$$

where $\mathcal{M}_t$ can encode fiscal expenditure, duration, number of affected institutions, material intensity, legal scope, or another declared measure. Equation 48 is deliberately agnostic about whether $\mathcal{M}_t$ is scalar. Different applications can legitimately measure intervention scale differently.

Magnitude alone does not determine the response trajectory. Section 5 represented the system-level effect of a response by the trajectory map $\Psi_{t,H}$. The relevant structural consequence depends on the configuration into which the response enters, the perturbations that coexist with it, and the transition structure through which its effects propagate. Two responses can consequently display magnitude–forcing divergence: a response that is smaller under the chosen magnitude descriptor can produce a larger loss of future redirection capacity under the structural criteria developed below.

This distinction is particularly important under conditional near-criticality. The predecessor paper uses criticality as a hypothesis of elevated susceptibility rather than a synonym for crisis or disorder (Huang 2026). If response effects are strongly state-dependent, a formally modest intervention can alter a coupling, authorization relation, or path-dependent commitment that changes later reachability. Conversely, a resource-intensive protective intervention can be designed to expire, decentralize, restore resources, or preserve several post-intervention pathways. The analytical question concerns what the response changed about the system’s later capacity to respond; visible intervention quantity is only one input.

Figure 4 illustrates this distinction. The figure is schematic and does not imply that large interventions are generally less forcing or that small interventions are generally more forcing.

8.2 A Multidimensional Forcing Profile

The closure footprint in Equation 45 captures one aspect of forcing, but closure alone is incomplete. An intervention can preserve several formal continuation classes while making them practically unrecoverable, reducing the variety of later effective responses, or entrenching a structure whose exit becomes progressively costly. The present paper represents forcing through four dimensions.

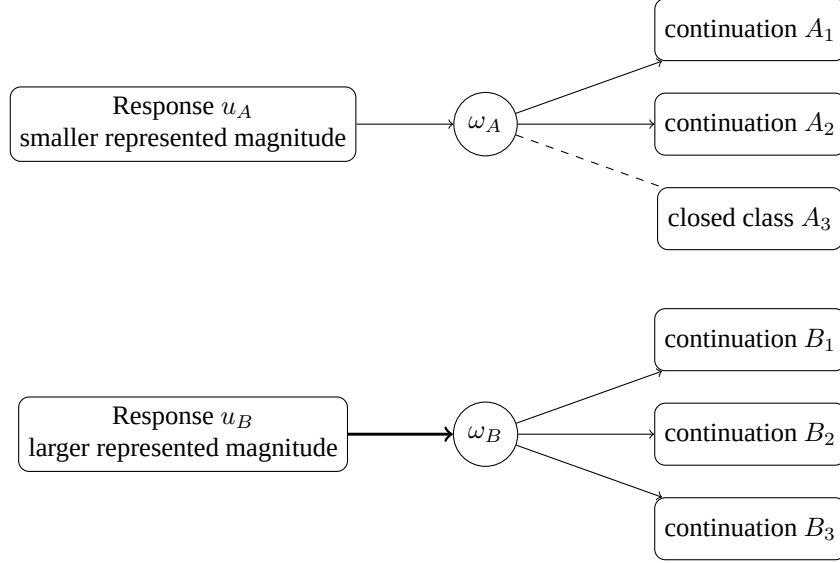


Figure 4: Illustrative distinction between represented intervention magnitude and later pathway closure. A smaller response can close a declared continuation class, while a larger response can preserve several later pathways. The diagram is conceptual and does not assign general priority to either response.

First, let $\text{Close}_{t,T}(u)$ retain its meaning from Section 7. Second, let $\mathfrak{R}_t$ be a declared family of recovery targets. Equation 49 defines the recovery targets lost after response u .

$$\text{RecLoss}_{t,T}(u) = \{R \in \mathfrak{R}_t : R \text{ is reachable before } u \text{ and not reachable after } u\}. \quad (49)$$

The phrase “reachable before” in Equation 49 uses the same common horizon and declared update family as the comparisons in Section 7. The set can contain exact-state targets, functional recovery targets, or other application-specific recovery classes, but the target family must be declared before comparison.

Third, let $\mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{\text{eff,pre}}$ denote the effective response repertoire available over the declared horizon before u , and let $\mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{\text{eff,(u)}}$ denote the corresponding repertoire after the response. Equation 50 defines response-repertoire contraction.

$$\text{RepLoss}_{t,T}(u) = \mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{\text{eff,pre}} \setminus \mathcal{A}_{t,T}^{\text{eff,(u)}}. \quad (50)$$

Equation 50 is again descriptive. Losing a response can be desirable when the response is dangerous or illegitimate. The set records contraction, not welfare loss.

Fourth, structural entrenchment concerns the degree to which a response makes its successor structure harder to modify or exit. Equation 51 introduces an application-specific descriptor without presuming a universal numerical measure.

$$\text{Entr}_{t,T} : \mathcal{U}_t \longrightarrow \mathcal{E}_{t,T}^{\text{entr}} \quad (51)$$

The codomain $\mathcal{E}_{t,T}^{\text{entr}}$ in Equation 51 can be ordered, where justified, by a preorder $\preceq_{\text{entr}}$. The descriptor can incorporate switching costs, institutional complementarities, dependency accumulation, authorization barriers, or other features that make later revision more difficult. Its empirical construction is a separate research task.

Equation 52 collects the four dimensions into the response’s forcing profile.

$$\mathfrak{F}_{t,T}(u) = (\text{Close}_{t,T}(u), \text{RecLoss}_{t,T}(u), \text{RepLoss}_{t,T}(u), \text{Entr}_{t,T}(u)). \quad (52)$$

Equation 52 intentionally remains non-scalar. The four components are related but not interchangeable. A response can close few continuation classes while deeply entrenching one successor structure, or preserve many nominal responses while destroying the recovery pathway that matters for a declared protection problem. Any scalar aggregation would require empirical and normative judgments about the relative importance of these dimensions.

Table 6 summarizes the interpretation and limitation of each component.

Table 6: Dimensions of the response forcing profile.

Dimension	Structural question	Limitation of the descriptor
Trajectory closure	Which declared continuation classes cease to be reachable after the response?	A lost continuation can be undesirable, irrelevant, or normatively excluded.
Recovery loss	Which declared return or functional-recovery targets cease to be reachable?	Recovery targets depend on the selected representation and horizon.
Response-repertoire contraction	Which effective later responses cease to remain dynamically available?	More responses are not automatically better; some contractions are intentional.
Structural entrenchment	How strongly does the response increase the difficulty of modifying or exiting the successor structure?	The descriptor is application-specific and need not admit a universal metric.

8.3 Task-Relative Forcing Dominance

A response should not be called unnecessarily forcing merely because another response preserves more possibilities. The comparison becomes meaningful only relative to a declared task projection and a represented family of responses satisfying that projection together with the side constraints included in the model. Let $\mathcal{P}_t$ denote this immediate task projection, introduced in Section 7, and let $\mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}}$ denote the represented feasible responses satisfying it. Two members of $\mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}}$ are therefore comparable with respect to $\mathcal{P}_t$; they are not assumed equivalent in distribution, robustness, legality, timing, cost, or any dimension omitted from the projection.

For the first three set-valued dimensions, smaller loss is represented by set inclusion. For structural entrenchment, use the declared preorder $\preceq_{\text{entr}}$. Equation 53 states the condition under which response v is no more forcing than response u relative to the declared representation.

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Close}_{t,T}(v) &\subseteq \text{Close}_{t,T}(u), \\
 \text{RecLoss}_{t,T}(v) &\subseteq \text{RecLoss}_{t,T}(u), \\
 \text{RepLoss}_{t,T}(v) &\subseteq \text{RepLoss}_{t,T}(u), \\
 \text{Entr}_{t,T}(v) &\preceq_{\text{entr}} \text{Entr}_{t,T}(u).
 \end{aligned} \tag{53}$$

Write $v \prec_{\mathfrak{F}} u$ when Equation 53 holds and at least one of its four comparisons is strict. This relation is only a partial order after quotienting any equivalences induced by the component preorders; in general, two responses can remain incomparable because one preserves more recovery capacity while another preserves more response diversity.

Equation 54 defines the task-relative non-dominated response family.

$$\mathcal{N}_{t,T}^{\mathcal{P}} = \{u \in \mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}} : \nexists v \in \mathcal{U}_t^{\mathcal{P}} \text{ such that } v \prec_{\mathfrak{F}} u\}. \tag{54}$$

Equation 54 does not produce a unique response. Several responses can remain non-dominated because the forcing profile is multidimensional. Nor does non-domination establish political desirability. A non-dominated response can be unlawful, distributively unacceptable, epistemically unsupported, or inferior on considerations not represented in $\mathfrak{F}_{t,T}$. The construction has a narrower function: within the declared task and represented forcing dimensions, it identifies responses for which no represented alternative accomplishes the same minimum task while weakly reducing every forcing component and strictly reducing at least one.

This gives a more precise interpretation of *unnecessary forcing*. A response is forcing-dominated only relative to a comparison class, a declared task, a horizon, and a representation of later possibilities. The same response can be non-dominated under one task and dominated under another. A change in the represented failure modes, recovery targets, or institutional constraints can also change the comparison. Non-forcing is accordingly relational and conditional; it is not an intrinsic label attached permanently to an action type.

The construction also clarifies why intervention magnitude cannot substitute for the forcing profile. If u has smaller magnitude than v under μ_t while $v \prec_{\mathfrak{F}} u$, the smaller response is nevertheless forcing-dominated under the declared structural criteria. Conversely, a larger response can be forcing-dominated by a smaller one. No monotonic relation between μ_t and $\mathfrak{F}_{t,T}$ follows without additional assumptions linking intervention scale to closure, recovery, repertoire, and entrenchment.

8.4 Dynamical Representation of Non-Forcing

The non-dominated family in Equation 54 should not be called the set of *wuwei* actions. Such a label would collapse the philosophical remainder identified in Section 4 and would imply a precision that the present reconstruction does not possess. The formal object is better interpreted as a *task-relative non-forcing candidate family*: responses that satisfy the declared task and are not structurally dominated on the represented forcing dimensions.

Define this family by Equation 55.

$$\mathcal{U}_{t,T}^{\text{nf}}(\mathcal{P}_t, \mathfrak{F}) := \mathcal{N}_{t,T}^{\mathcal{P}}. \quad (55)$$

Equation 55 is intentionally modest. It does not say that every member is normatively permissible or philosophically exemplary. It states only that, among responses satisfying the particular task, no represented alternative is uniformly less forcing across all declared dimensions. Additional criteria can legitimately shrink the candidate family. They cannot be inferred from the forcing profile itself.

The explanatory mechanism associated with W_{nf} can now be stated. Let M_{nf} denote the mechanism by which state-dependent response effects generate differences in trajectory closure, recovery loss, response-repertoire contraction, and structural entrenchment among interventions satisfying the same task projection. Let χ_{nf} denote the conditions under which those differences alter at least one declared forcing comparison over the relevant horizon and the represented comparison class is adequate. Equation 56 states the candidate explanatory relation.

$$M_{\text{nf}} \rightsquigarrow_{\chi_{\text{nf}}} W_{\text{nf}}. \quad (56)$$

Equation 56 has a limited explanatory content. A contemporary dynamical model can identify one practical reason for distinguishing non-forcing from low intervention magnitude: responses that satisfy the same declared immediate requirement may impose substantially different later structural footprints. That comparison remains a modern analytical construction and carries neither historical attribution nor normative proof.

Hypothesis 8.1 (Forcing-profile explanation of non-forcing). When several represented feasible responses satisfy the same declared task projection, their later effects differ on independently specified forcing dimensions, and at least one response is forcing-dominated by another, the domination relation supplies discriminating content for a candidate explanation of W_{nf} . This conclusion is limited to the represented projection and dimensions: it neither establishes overall response equivalence nor implies that weaker intervention is preferable or that non-dominated responses are normatively interchangeable.

Hypothesis 8.1 is deliberately conditional. The explanation weakens when the represented forcing dimensions omit a consequence required for the comparison, when responses satisfying the same task projection differ on omitted robustness, distributional, legal, or timing constraints, when the represented feasible set contains only one response, when a side constraint requires irreversible exclusion of a pathway, or when the transition structure is sufficiently invariant that the forcing profile adds little information beyond intervention magnitude. The hypothesis can fail even if the broader Criticality Hypothesis remains viable.

The concept also avoids an opposite error. Preserving many future pathways is not automatically non-forcing when those pathways are maintained by imposing severe present burdens or by blocking a necessary protective response. A response can preserve optionality for one set of actors while imposing

dependency or irreversibility on another. Application consequently requires the forcing profile to be indexed to the relevant relational scope and affected parties rather than treated as an observer-free property of the system.

8.5 Forcing under Conditional Near-Criticality

Near-criticality is not required for the distinction between magnitude and forcing, but it can strengthen the explanatory relevance of that distinction. Under the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis, some relational configurations may combine organized persistence with elevated susceptibility and continuing reconfigurability (Huang 2026). In such a regime, an intervention that changes a key coupling or transition rule can have persistent second-order consequences even when the initiating act is modest. The same mechanism can make temporary buffering, modular response, or staged commitment comparatively important when they satisfy the immediate task while retaining later correction capacity.

The relevant implication is not “criticality favors less intervention.” The proposed increment is narrower: when elevated susceptibility is combined with sufficient persistence and continuing reconfigurability, changes to a key coupling or transition rule may have consequences that are both amplified and carried into later response structure. In such cases, visible intervention magnitude becomes a less informative proxy for structural forcing. Whether this increment is genuinely specific to near-criticality remains an empirical comparison against neighboring nonlinear or path-dependent regimes, as required by the explanatory protocol of Section 4.

The resulting reconstruction of non-forcing is neither quietist nor scalar. It does not ask governance to minimize effort, expenditure, coercive intensity, or policy scope independently of context. It asks whether the declared task projection can be met without a response that is structurally dominated in closure, recoverability loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment. Even this question remains only one part of political judgment. The next section brings the four candidate correspondences together and asks which restricted *wuwei* intuitions retain a candidate explanatory correspondence, which show only conceptual consonance, and where the relation should be suspended.

9 Dynamical Explanatory Status of Restricted Wuwei Intuitions

Sections 5–8 developed four candidate mechanisms corresponding to the restricted *wuwei*-related propositions reconstructed in Section 2. The present section evaluates those mechanisms under the explanatory discipline established in Section 4. Its objective is comparative rather than additive: the section asks how much explanatory work each mechanism currently performs, where a correspondence remains incomplete, and which conditions would weaken it. The method is a conceptual mechanism assessment. It evaluates independent specification, mechanism relevance, scope matching, criticality-specific increment, contrastive content, and failure visibility. Passing those checks remains weaker than empirical confirmation, historical identity, or normative authorization.

9.1 Evaluation Categories and Comparative Procedure

The candidate matrix in Table 5 was introduced before the substantive mechanisms had been examined. The later sections now permit a more discriminating assessment. Three outcomes are sufficient for the present purpose.

A *candidate explanatory correspondence* is retained when the mechanism is independently specified, adds discriminating content beyond the definition of the restricted proposition, operates over a defensible overlap of scope, and has visible conditions under which the correspondence would weaken. The label is intentionally pre-empirical: it records that the mechanism is sufficiently articulated to merit testing, not that it is probable or operative in a particular political setting. When the correspondence is described as criticality-based, it must also identify an increment supplied by the near-critical regime beyond generic nonlinearity, adaptation, or path dependence.

Conceptual consonance is a weaker outcome. It applies when the philosophical proposition and dynamical description exhibit a meaningful structural affinity but the mechanism does not yet explain why the proposition would become especially intelligible under the stated conditions. Consonance can motivate further inquiry, but it does not satisfy the mechanism-relevance requirement in Section 4.3.

An *unsupported correspondence* results when the proposed mapping fails the present explanatory test. This can occur because the mechanism is absent, because the scope of the mechanism and proposition does not overlap sufficiently, because the explanatory contrast disappears, or because the proposed relation depends on an assumption stronger than the paper has declared. Such a result would reject or suspend one correspondence without deciding the status of the remaining propositions or of the broader Criticality Hypothesis.

The three categories are deliberately non-numerical. A scalar score would suggest a precision that the present argument does not possess and would obscure the different reasons a correspondence can remain limited. The assessment therefore proceeds proposition by proposition and keeps two forms of remainder visible. An *interpretive remainder* concerns aspects of *wuwei* that the dynamical mechanism does not claim to explain. A *mechanistic remainder* concerns additional assumptions required before the proposed mechanism can support the restricted proposition under a concrete domain specification.

9.2 Configuration-Sensitive Responsiveness

The configuration-sensitivity correspondence is the most direct application of the state-dependent response architecture developed in Section 5. Proposition 5.1 established a limited result internal to the representation: when two relational configurations exhibit the same represented target discrepancy while the same response generates materially different effect signatures, target discrepancy alone is insufficient to characterize the response problem. Hypothesis 5.2 then proposed that this state dependence can explain why a response architecture sensitive to the configuration it enters may become practically intelligible.

The mechanism contributes more than a verbal resemblance between responsiveness and adaptation. It identifies a specific explanatory contrast. Under configurations for which response effects vary materially with coupling structure, history, or local susceptibility, an invariant target-directed rule can ignore information that changes the consequences of the action itself. Under a response-invariance region, by contrast, the same configuration-sensitive rationale weakens because materially different configurations no longer generate relevant differences in the represented response effect. Configuration dependence thereby supplies a discriminating reason for attending to the situation rather than merely redescribing situational awareness as desirable.

The correspondence also satisfies a restricted form of scope matching. State dependence is not unique to near-critical systems, and the argument does not require criticality for every instance of responsive action. Conditional near-criticality matters because elevated susceptibility and continuing reconfigurability can enlarge the consequences of ignoring response-relevant configuration differences. The criticality framework may increase the explanatory salience of configuration sensitivity where the joint near-critical profile makes those state differences more consequential, without converting the result into a universal governance rule.

Within the present framework, the relation between M_{cfg} and W_{cfg} is retained provisionally as a *candidate explanatory correspondence* under the conditions stated in Hypothesis 5.2. Its specifically criticality-based component is narrower than the generic state-dependence result: criticality contributes only insofar as elevated susceptibility, persistence, and reconfigurability make configuration differences more consequential over the relevant horizon. Its explanatory force would weaken when the relevant effect map is approximately invariant across the configurations under consideration, when the variables used to distinguish configurations are unrelated to the intervention consequences, or when the claimed sensitivity is generated only by redefining the state description after the outcome is known. A further practical limitation remains outside the explanatory claim: even when configuration sensitivity matters dynamically, institutions may lack timely information or reliable procedures for responding to it. The mechanism explains why sensitivity can matter; it does not establish that discretionary adaptation is

feasible, lawful, fair, or preferable to a stable rule.

The interpretive remainder is likewise substantial. The mechanism does not explain experiential, ethical, spiritual, or linguistic dimensions of effortless or non-assertive action. It addresses only the restricted proposition that response generation can depend on relational configuration when the chosen representation makes configuration consequential for the effects of action.

9.3 Restraint toward Unnecessary Forcing

The non-forcing correspondence developed in Section 8 begins from a distinction that the restricted reconstruction requires: intervention magnitude and structural forcing are analytically separable. The forcing profile in Equation 52 represents four dimensions of later structural consequence—trajectory closure, recovery-target loss, response-repertoire contraction, and entrenchment—while Equation 54 compares responses only within a declared task-relative feasible family. Hypothesis 8.1 then states the proposed explanatory bridge to W_{nf} .

This mechanism provides contrastive content because responses comparable on the declared task projection can differ across independently specified forcing dimensions. When one feasible response is structurally dominated by another across the represented dimensions, restraint toward the dominated response has a dynamical rationale that cannot be recovered from immediate intervention magnitude alone. This yields one restricted sense in which “forcing” can be unnecessary: the declared task can be satisfied while avoiding additional closure, loss of recovery capacity, contraction of later response repertoire, or entrenchment represented by the model. The explanatory gain would be circular, however, if those dimensions were chosen only because they already encode the desired meaning of non-forcing. Their contribution therefore depends on independent dynamical interpretation or measurement: closure, recovery loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment must track consequences of the transition structure that can be specified without first labeling a response as *wuwei* or forcing.

The relation is broader than the revisability correspondence considered below. W_{rev} focuses on preservation of meaningful correction, recovery, and redirection pathways. W_{nf} evaluates a wider profile of structural imposition. A response can preserve one class of correction pathways while still producing strong entrenchment or eliminating response diversity elsewhere. Conversely, a response can intentionally close some harmful trajectories while remaining comparatively non-forcing with respect to the declared task. Keeping the two propositions distinct prevents revisability from becoming a complete definition of non-forcing.

Within the declared representation, M_{nf} is retained as a *candidate explanatory correspondence* for W_{nf} when task-projection comparability is meaningful, the comparison class contains genuine alternatives, and the forcing-profile dimensions track independently specified consequences over the relevant horizon and relational scope. The contribution of criticality is conditional rather than constitutive: forcing-profile differences can exist in many dynamical regimes, while near-criticality may increase their salience by making coupling changes and pathway closure more persistent or consequential. The explanation weakens when responses comparable on the declared task projection differ on omitted requirements, when the forcing profile omits a consequence required for the comparison, when the represented feasible set contains only one response, or when a side constraint requires irreversible exclusion of a pathway. It also weakens when the represented structural consequences become approximately monotone in intervention magnitude, because the analytical distinction that motivates the mechanism then contributes less information.

This assessment does not produce a general preference for low-intensity intervention. A large buffering response can remain less forcing than a small institutional commitment if the former satisfies the same protective function while preserving more later correction capacity. The explanatory result is therefore relational and task-indexed. Normative evaluation of coercion, distribution, legality, legitimacy, and affected parties remains an additional inquiry.

9.4 Terminal Openness and Relational Transformation

The terminal-openness correspondence has a different structure. Section 6 represented relational tension as an evolving configuration whose transformation can depend on the response and the surrounding transition structure. Proposition 6.1 established that equivalent resolution of a represented tension need not generate equivalent successor structures. Hypothesis 6.2 then proposed that this divergence can supply a dynamical reason for leaving some terminal dimensions unspecified when the immediate functional requirement does not require a unique final configuration.

The mechanism is informative because it distinguishes resolution from transformation. If several successor configurations satisfy the declared task projection and side constraints while differing in their later relational structure, a response that fixes a complete terminal form performs more than that projection alone requires. Under state-dependent transformation, that additional specification can alter which subsequent relations remain available and can therefore become dynamically consequential. This provides more than conceptual consonance between openness and emergence: the successor-structure dependence identifies a mechanism through which terminal over-specification can matter.

The explanatory bridge nevertheless contains a larger mechanistic remainder than the configuration-sensitivity and non-forcing correspondences. Resolution–transformation non-equivalence does not by itself favor openness. A unique terminal configuration may be required by law, safety, treaty obligation, technical coordination, or a separately justified political objective. Multiple successor structures can also differ sharply in harms, distribution, or stability. The mechanism supports terminal openness only when a family of configurations satisfies the declared requirement, current criteria leave more than one terminal configuration defensible, and fixing additional terminal dimensions would close possibilities relevant to adaptation, learning, or later correction without serving an independently established need.

On those conditions, M_{tr} remains a candidate explanatory correspondence to W_{open} , with a comparatively large unresolved bridge. It exceeds mere conceptual consonance only when the successor-structure mechanism changes a declared continuation criterion and the admissibility and terminal-selection criteria have been supplied independently. Its scope is correspondingly narrow. The explanation would fail under the present framework if the task and side constraints select a unique terminal structure, if successor-structure differences do not alter a declared continuation criterion over the relevant horizon, or if leaving terminal form open violates a supplied protective or coordination constraint.

The interpretive remainder is also larger. W_{open} was introduced in Section 2.5 as a contemporary abstraction with looser direct interpretive support than configuration-sensitive response or non-forcing. The present mechanism can therefore illuminate the analytical reconstruction without establishing that the historical material cited here contains a theory of underdetermined terminal states. The tension framework likewise carries no presumption that endogenous transformation is progressive, harmonious, or normatively desirable.

9.5 Revisability, Recovery, and Future Redirection

The revisability correspondence is the most formally specified of the four while also being the most explicitly contemporary in interpretive status. Section 7 distinguished exact return, functional recovery, and broader revisability, then represented response-induced closure relative to a declared horizon and a set of continuation classes specified for correction analysis. Proposition 7.1 prevents recovery and revisability from being collapsed, while Hypothesis 7.2 states the proposed explanatory relation between unequal closure consequences and W_{rev} .

The mechanism has its clearest proposed role when two responses address the same present requirement while leaving different structures of later correction available. A response that destroys return, recovery, or redirection pathways can make later error correction more difficult because the intervention changes which corrections remain feasible. The explanatory step is not the definition of revisability itself. It is the counterfactual consequence of unequal closure under uncertainty: if later correction is included in the declared comparison criteria and one response comparable on the task projection removes feasible correction pathways that another preserves, closure changes the represented capacity to respond to subse-

quent error or change. Without that downstream consequence, the correspondence would amount mainly to conceptual restatement. Under conditional near-criticality, the consideration may become especially salient when elevated susceptibility makes localized responses capable of reorganizing later accessibility and continuing reconfigurability gives preserved correction pathways practical content.

The correspondence also has visible failure conditions. Revisability preservation supplies little explanatory content when later correction pathways are already absent, when the relevant response effects are cheaply reversible, when the declared horizon is too short or too long to represent the decision problem, or when preservation of a pathway conflicts with a requirement to eliminate a serious and independently established harm. The representation can also fail if the chosen recovery targets or redirection sets encode the desired conclusion in advance. These limitations are analytical rather than incidental because revisability is meaningful only relative to specified functions, histories, affected relations, and possible future corrections.

Within those restrictions, M_{rev} is retained as a *candidate explanatory correspondence* for W_{rev} . The strength of the mechanism should not be confused with historical proximity. Section 2.6 introduced revisability explicitly as a contemporary extension rather than a technical doctrine attributed to the *Laozi*. The present result therefore has an asymmetric status: the dynamical relation is comparatively well specified, while the philosophical target is comparatively distant from direct historical reconstruction. Stronger formal clarity on the modern side cannot by itself narrow that interpretive distance.

The same asymmetry prevents a slide from revisability into option maximization. The mechanism concerns preservation of meaningful correction capacity relative to a declared task. It permits intentional commitment and deliberate closure when those closures are required by the declared task or side constraints. The explanatory contribution lies in showing why avoidable destruction of correction pathways can matter in a historically evolving system, not in treating a larger reachable set as intrinsically better.

9.6 Comparative Explanatory Profile

The four assessments can now replace the initial candidate matrix with a provisional explanatory profile. Table 7 summarizes the mechanism contributed by each section, the current assessment, and the principal limitation that remains visible.

Table 7 reveals two forms of asymmetry that are important for the paper’s overall conclusion. First, dynamical specification and historical proximity do not move together. W_{rev} has a comparatively explicit dynamical mechanism while remaining the least direct historical reconstruction. W_{cfg} has comparatively closer, though still indirect, interpretive motivation and a relatively direct state-dependent mechanism. W_{open} retains the largest combined interpretive and mechanistic remainder because the step from transformation sensitivity to terminal openness requires additional conditions.

Second, the four mechanisms overlap without becoming interchangeable. Configuration sensitivity concerns the generation of response from the current relational state. Non-forcing concerns the comparative structural footprint of task-satisfying responses. Terminal openness concerns the degree to which the eventual configuration must be specified in advance. Revisability concerns the preservation of later correction, recovery, and redirection capacity. A single intervention can score differently across these dimensions: it can be highly configuration-sensitive while strongly entrenching; it can preserve revisability while fixing a particular protected function; or it can leave terminal form open while imposing substantial present burdens. The explanatory architecture remains plural and resists reduction to one scalar principle.

The present assessment suggests a qualified synthesis. Configuration-sensitive responsiveness, non-forcing, and revisability have candidate explanatory correspondences with discriminating dynamical content under stated conditions. Terminal openness remains a weaker candidate because its bridge depends more heavily on task admissibility and terminal-selection criteria supplied from outside the dynamical model. Calling any of these correspondences specifically criticality-based additionally requires evidence that the near-critical profile contributes explanatory leverage beyond generic nonlinear, adaptive, or path-dependent dynamics. The results remain mechanism-level correspondences. They neither establish the

Table 7: Provisional explanatory status of the four restricted *wuwei*-related propositions. The assessments concern conceptual-mechanistic adequacy within the present framework rather than empirical confirmation or normative justification.

Proposition	Mechanism contribution	Current explanatory status	Principal limitation or failure condition
W_{cfg}	State/configuration dependence can make the same target-directed response produce materially different effects.	Candidate explanatory correspondence under χ_{cfg} .	Weakens under response invariance, irrelevant state descriptions, or post hoc reconstruction of configuration differences.
W_{nf}	Responses comparable on a declared task projection can differ in closure, recovery loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment.	Candidate explanatory correspondence under χ_{nf} .	Depends on task-projection adequacy, represented side constraints, forcing dimensions, horizon, and relational scope.
W_{open}	Equivalent resolution can lead to different successor structures, making additional terminal specification dynamically consequential.	Candidate correspondence with a comparatively large unresolved bridge under χ_{tr} .	Requires multiple task-admissible terminal structures, non-unique selection under declared criteria, and consequence for a stated continuation criterion.
W_{rev}	Responses can differ in avoidable closure of return, recovery, and future-redirection pathways.	Candidate explanatory correspondence under χ_{rev} .	Strongly horizon-, representation-, and task-dependent; the proposition is an explicit contemporary extension.

empirical prevalence of near-criticality in a particular international system nor validate *wuwei* as a complete philosophical or political doctrine. They also leave normative questions open whenever several dynamically defensible responses distribute burdens, risks, authority, or rights differently.

The remaining analytical task is therefore to make the boundaries of these correspondences more explicit. The next section collects the principal failure conditions across philosophical reconstruction, criticality attribution, mechanism specification, representation, horizon, and normative inference, so that the explanatory synthesis remains revisable rather than self-sealing.

10 Explanatory Scope and Failure Conditions

Section 9 assigned provisional explanatory status to four restricted *wuwei*-related propositions. The present section identifies the conditions under which those assessments weaken and specifies the inferential consequence of each type of failure. The analysis is diagnostic: it separates vulnerabilities in philosophical reconstruction, regime attribution, mechanism specification, cross-framework correspondence, representation and scope, and later normative judgment. These components remain independently revisable, so criticism can be directed to the layer whose support has changed.

The section therefore adopts a layered failure structure. A correspondence can weaken because the reconstructed proposition inadequately represents the relevant *wuwei* material; the criticality hypothesis lacks support at the declared scale and horizon; the candidate mechanism is absent or misrepresented; the mechanism lacks discriminating explanatory relevance; the result is unstable under defensible alternative representations, horizons, or relational scopes; or a dynamical result is being extended into a normative conclusion without the premises required for that extension. The vulnerabilities are related and analytically distinct. The objective is to preserve inferential locality while keeping interactions among failure

layers visible.

10.1 A Layered Failure Architecture

The explanatory relation defined in Section 4 was intentionally conditional. Its components were reconstructed independently before a correspondence was asserted, and Table 4 required scope matching, a criticality-specific increment where that label is used, contrastive content, and visible failure conditions. Section 9 then evaluated each candidate mechanism under that protocol. The resulting claims should therefore be read as a chain of locally defeasible steps rather than as a single inference from criticality to *wuwei*.

Table 8 summarizes six principal failure layers. The final column records the neighboring questions that remain independently assessable after a local failure.

The table makes the paper’s modularity explicit. Suppose, for example, that the correspondence between relational transformation and openness of terminal form is judged too weak. That result would require revision of $M_{tr} \rightsquigarrow W_{open}$ as assessed in Section 9.4. It would not by itself show that configuration-sensitive response lacks a dynamical rationale, that revisability is conceptually incoherent, or that the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis is false. Conversely, evidence against near-criticality at a particular scale would weaken the paper’s *criticality-based* explanation at that scale even if the restricted practical proposition remained defensible for independent philosophical or institutional reasons.

Remark 10.1 (Inferential locality of failure). A failed explanatory correspondence is local to the relation being tested unless an additional argument connects that failure to a broader claim. In particular, failure of $M_j \rightsquigarrow_{\chi} W_i$ does not by itself falsify W_i , falsify M_j outside χ , or falsify the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis from which the mechanism was conditionally developed.

Remark 10.1 is not a protective device against criticism. It identifies the level at which criticism should operate. A modular architecture is useful only if local components can in fact be rejected, weakened, or replaced without redescribing every adverse result as success. The remainder of this section therefore states the main weakening conditions more concretely.

10.2 Reconstruction Dependence and Interpretive Scope

The first vulnerability arises before criticality enters the argument. Section 2 reconstructed a deliberately restricted family of propositions rather than attempting a complete definition of historical *wuwei*. The distinctions among passivity, restraint, responsiveness, non-forcing, terminal openness, and revisability were introduced to keep the philosophical target sufficiently thin for cross-framework analysis. That decision creates an interpretive obligation: the analytical propositions should remain recognizably connected to the source tradition without being presented as exhaustive or historically uniform.

A correspondence weakens if the restricted proposition is obtained only by translating modern dynamical vocabulary backward into classical material. For W_{cfg} , this would occur if configuration sensitivity were defined so abstractly that almost any context-aware action counted as evidence of the same concept. For W_{nf} , it would occur if non-forcing were reduced to whatever response happens to minimize a modern structural footprint. For W_{open} , it would occur if openness of terminal form were attributed as a technical historical doctrine rather than maintained as an analytical reconstruction. The risk is greatest for W_{rev} , which Section 2.6 explicitly identifies as a contemporary extension rather than a technical category directly attributed to the *Laozi*.

The failure condition is therefore not disagreement with one preferred interpretation. The paper can accommodate interpretive plurality. The more serious problem would be loss of independent reconstruction: if the proposition is formulated primarily to fit the mechanism that is later offered as its explanation, the correspondence becomes circular. The separation between textual interpretation, analytical reconstruction, and dynamical explanation established in Section 2 should remain visible throughout the argument. Existing scholarship on *wuwei* and the *Laozi* supports caution about treating a single analytical reconstruction as the whole tradition (Slingerland 2003a; Chan 2025).

Table 8: Principal failure layers in the explanatory architecture. A failure revises the corresponding claim while leaving adjacent layers independently assessable.

Failure layer	Characteristic weakening condition	Questions left open by the failure
Philosophical reconstruction	A restricted proposition misstates, overextends, or inadequately represents the relevant <i>wuwei</i> material.	The criticality framework and separately reconstructed practical propositions remain independently assessable.
Criticality attribution	The represented system lacks the required near-critical profile, or the proposed mechanism gains no identifiable increment from that profile at the declared scale and horizon.	The restricted proposition and similar mechanisms outside near-criticality remain independently assessable.
Mechanism specification	The proposed state dependence, closure, transformation, repertoire change, or entrenchment is absent or materially misrepresented.	Other candidate mechanisms under the broader Criticality Hypothesis remain open to separate assessment.
Explanatory correspondence	A mechanism is present but adds no discriminating explanation for the reconstructed proposition.	The mechanism’s validity in its own domain and the proposition’s support on other grounds remain open.
Representation and scope	The result is unstable under defensible changes in variables, horizon, relational scale, affected parties, or admissible updates.	Robustness and dependence require characterization across defensible representations and scopes.
Normative inference	A dynamical result is used to infer legitimacy, justice, legality, or political desirability without additional premises.	The dynamical result can remain relevant to narrower questions of consequence, revisability, or structural commitment.

Interpretive failure also has a limited consequence. If a proposition is judged too distant from defensible readings of *wuwei*, the corresponding dynamical analysis may remain useful as a contemporary governance concept while losing its status as an explanation of a *wuwei*-related intuition. The analytical mechanism need not disappear; what changes is the philosophical object to which it is legitimately connected. This possibility is especially relevant for revisability. A well-specified modern account of correction pathways can survive as a dynamical concept even if its relation to historical *wuwei* is judged too remote.

10.3 Criticality Attribution and Regime Dependence

The second vulnerability concerns whether the criticality background is applicable to the domain being analyzed. Section 3 inherited only the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis: international politics may, at some scales and intervals, exhibit a regime combining organized persistence, elevated susceptibility, and continuing reconfigurability. The hypothesis is comparative, representation-dependent, and conditional rather than a standing description of every political configuration (Huang 2026). The present paper therefore cannot infer the relevance of its mechanisms merely from the fact that an issue is politically complex, unstable, contentious, or uncertain.

A criticality-based explanation weakens when the represented system lacks the profile required by the mechanism. If susceptibility is low, interventions may have approximately local and proportionate effects over the relevant horizon. If persistence is too weak, apparent structural consequences may dissipate before they acquire the historical continuity required by the argument. If reconfigurability is severely constrained, preservation of alternative pathways may be practically empty because the relevant alternatives are not reachable under admissible updates. Similar problems arise when the system is represented at a scale that averages away the state dependence on which the mechanism relies.

The nested-hypothesis discipline in Section 3.4 creates an additional failure boundary. Mechanisms requiring endogenous maintenance, restorative feedback, turbulence-like transfer, or historically self-reorganizing response cannot be attributed to the Minimal Criticality Hypothesis unless the stronger hypothesis is independently supported. Section 6 was intentionally cautious on this point: the transformation mechanism can support a limited claim about successor structure without presuming progressive dialectical resolution or restorative dynamics. If a later application requires stronger endogenous restoration to make terminal openness intelligible, the application has moved beyond the minimal hypothesis and should declare that additional commitment.

Criticality attribution is also domain specific. A system can display elevated susceptibility at one relational scale while appearing comparatively regular at another. A near-critical diagnosis over a long institutional horizon need not describe the response problem faced over a short operational interval, and local near-critical behavior need not imply that the wider international system occupies the same regime. The paper’s explanatory claims therefore require the scale and horizon of the diagnosis to overlap the scale and horizon of the mechanism, as already required by Equation 19.

Failure at this layer has a precise consequence: the paper loses the basis for calling the explanation *criticality-based* in the specified domain. It does not follow that configuration sensitivity, non-forcing, terminal openness, or revisability become unintelligible. State dependence, path dependence, irreversibility, and response asymmetry can arise outside near-critical regimes. What is lost is the particular argument that conditional near-criticality amplifies the relevance of those considerations.

10.4 Mechanism Failure and Correspondence Failure

A third vulnerability concerns the distinction between a mechanism being absent and a mechanism being present but explanatorily insufficient. These cases should not be merged. Mechanism failure means that the represented causal or dynamical relation does not operate as claimed. Correspondence failure means that the relation may operate, yet it does not explain the restricted proposition in a discriminating way.

For configuration-sensitive responsiveness, mechanism failure would be indicated when materially different represented configurations produce approximately invariant response effects over the relevant domain. In that case, the state-dependent divergence required by Proposition 5.1 disappears. Correspondence failure is different: state dependence might remain real, but if it provides no reason to distinguish the relevant response architecture from a neighboring target-directed architecture, it adds little explanatory content to W_{cfg} .

For non-forcing, mechanism failure can occur when the forcing dimensions in Equation 52 do not vary meaningfully among feasible responses, or when purportedly distinct structural footprints are artifacts of an inadequate model. Correspondence failure can occur even when the profiles differ. If the differences have no connection to what the restricted proposition means by unnecessary forcing, the result is at most conceptual proximity. The same distinction applies to revisability: intervention-induced closure can be real while still failing to explain W_{rev} if the closure affects pathways that are irrelevant to correction, recovery, or redirection under the declared task.

Terminal openness is particularly sensitive to correspondence failure. Proposition 6.1 establishes that equivalent resolution of a tension can coexist with different successor structures. That result alone leaves terminal selection unresolved. The explanatory bridge requires more than one terminal configuration to satisfy task and side constraints specified independently of the dynamics, the current evidence and declared criteria to leave terminal selection non-unique, and additional pre-specification to remove continuation possibilities included in the comparison. If those conditions are absent, the transformation mechanism can remain valid while the correspondence to W_{open} fails.

The distinction between mechanism and correspondence also clarifies the paper’s relation to future evidence. Empirical or computational work could support the existence of state-dependent closure, repertoire contraction, or successor-structure divergence without thereby confirming the philosophical mapping. Conversely, an interpretive argument could strengthen the reconstruction of a *wuwei* proposition without establishing that the proposed dynamical mechanism operates in contemporary international pol-

itics. The two forms of inquiry can inform one another while retaining separate burdens of support.

10.5 Representation, Model, and Counterfactual Dependence

Several core objects in the paper are representation-relative. Reachable futures depend on the variables used to describe the state, the admissible update rules, the modeled constraints, and the horizon. Recovery depends on which functions or relational properties are treated as recovery targets. Response repertoire depends on what counts as consequential and sufficiently coherent response diversity. Forcing depends on the represented dimensions of closure, recovery loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment. These qualifications are inherited from the predecessor framework and were preserved in Sections 7 and 8 (Huang 2026).

Representation dependence does not make the analysis arbitrary. It creates a requirement to show that the representation tracks distinctions material to the research question. A model that omits a decisive institutional constraint can overstate reachability. A model that aggregates actors whose pathways differ can conceal asymmetric closure. A state description chosen after observing the outcome can manufacture apparent configuration sensitivity. A recovery target defined so broadly that almost every successor configuration counts as recovery can trivialize loss; one defined too narrowly can manufacture irreversibility. Similar problems arise if structural entrenchment is represented through a preorder that embeds the desired policy conclusion rather than a defensible account of persistence and difficulty of revision.

Counterfactual adequacy is part of the same problem. Claims about unnecessary forcing require a meaningful comparison set. Equation 54 identifies domination only among represented feasible responses satisfying a declared task projection and included side constraints. Equality on that projection is not overall equivalence. If the comparison class excludes realistic alternatives, a response can appear non-dominated because the model has removed its competitors. If alternatives differ on omitted robustness, distributional, legal, timing, or protective constraints, the domination relation can be misleading. Conversely, an unrealistically permissive comparison class can make actual responses appear dominated by infeasible idealizations.

The appropriate robustness test asks whether the explanatory conclusion persists, weakens in an intelligible way, or reverses under *defensible* alternative representations. Invariance across every conceivable representation would usually be too strong. A useful application should identify which modeling choices are load-bearing. Where a conclusion reverses, that reversal is substantive information about the dependence of the explanation and should remain visible in the reported result.

This requirement is especially important because some of the paper’s formal objects are schematic rather than empirically parameterized models. Their current role is to discipline distinctions and expose assumptions. An empirical application would require additional work on variable selection, measurement, model validation, uncertainty, and comparison against neighboring dynamical accounts. The present formalism should not be read as substituting for that work.

10.6 Horizon, Relational Scale, and Affected Parties

Time horizon and relational scope can change the evaluation of the same response. A temporary intervention may appear strongly constraining over a short horizon while preserving substantial later redirection capacity. Another intervention may appear minimally restrictive immediately while gradually producing institutional dependence or entrenchment. The closure and forcing objects introduced in Sections 7 and 8 are therefore indexed to a declared interval rather than treated as timeless properties.

Horizon choice should follow the response problem rather than be selected to secure a desired conclusion. A horizon that ends before delayed consequences become visible can understate closure. A horizon extending far beyond any defensible model validity can create speculative pathways whose presence or absence cannot be meaningfully compared. Multi-horizon analysis may therefore be preferable where short-run protection and long-run revisability pull in different directions. The explanatory result can then be reported as horizon-sensitive rather than forced into a single summary judgment.

Relational scale creates a parallel issue. Preserving revisability for one organization, institution, or actor can reduce revisability for another. A pathway that remains available to a decision maker can impose dependence on those subject to the decision. A response that preserves aggregate system flexibility can still concentrate local burdens or eliminate meaningful alternatives within a subgroup. Section 8 already cautioned that optionality for one set of actors can coexist with dependency or irreversibility for another. The same point applies to every restricted proposition: configuration sensitivity, non-forcing, openness, and revisability should be indexed to the relations and affected parties relevant to the claim rather than attributed to “the system” without qualification.

This does not require the paper to solve distributive or procedural justice. It requires the dynamical description to avoid hiding distribution behind aggregation. A statement that a response preserves more pathways should specify whose pathways, at what scale, and with respect to which functions or constraints. A statement that a terminal form remains open should distinguish openness for authorized decision makers from openness experienced by those whose conditions are being transformed. These distinctions become inputs to later normative analysis rather than conclusions of the dynamical model itself.

10.7 Task Specification and Protective Closure

The notions of unnecessary forcing and avoidable closure are task-relative. This is not merely a technical qualification. It prevents the paper from treating closure itself as a failure. Governance frequently includes commitments, boundaries, exclusions, standards, protections, and durable institutions. A response can deliberately remove a pathway because removal of that pathway is part of the declared task or an independently supplied side constraint. The present framework asks a narrower question: whether additional closure is produced beyond what those represented requirements call for.

Task specification can itself become a source of circularity. If the declared task is defined so broadly that it already includes the preferred terminal structure, almost every additional commitment becomes “necessary” by construction. If the task is defined too narrowly, robustness, coordination, protection, or rights constraints omitted from the projection can be mislabeled as forcing. The comparison should separate the minimum functional requirement from side constraints and additional structural commitments as clearly as the application permits, while acknowledging cases in which that boundary is itself contestable.

Several recurring terms therefore function as indexed placeholders rather than conclusions supplied by the dynamical model. *Admissible* means satisfying the task and side constraints declared for the comparison; *relevant* means included in a stated outcome or continuation criterion; *avoidable* means that another represented response satisfies the same projection with less of a specified structural loss; and *protective* describes the role assigned to a constraint rather than establishing its legitimacy. An application that relies on *acceptable*, *serious*, *material*, or similar terms must state the rule by which those classifications are made. The model can propagate such criteria once supplied, but it cannot generate their normative authority.

The same issue affects terminal openness. A family of task-admissible terminal configurations exists only relative to supplied criteria and side constraints. If safety, continuity, rights protection, coordination, or another independently specified constraint selects a unique terminal structure, openness of terminal form has little work to do in that domain. If several configurations satisfy the represented requirement, fixing the remaining dimensions becomes a distinct intervention choice whose structural consequences can be analyzed. The authority of the requirement comes from outside the dynamical framework; the framework makes visible the additional closure associated with going beyond it.

Protective closure also illustrates why near-criticality does not imply weaker or slower intervention. Elevated susceptibility can sometimes make rapid commitment necessary to prevent cascading harm. A comparatively large or irreversible response can remain compatible with the framework when irreversibility is part of the justified protective requirement or when available alternatives fail the minimum task. The non-forcing analysis begins only after those requirements and feasible alternatives have been

specified. No abstract priority of optionality over protection follows from the analysis.

10.8 Normative Underdetermination

The final failure layer appears when a dynamical explanation is converted into a political recommendation without the additional premises required for that move. Section 4 separated explanation from evidence and justification, and the predecessor framework similarly distinguishes dynamical diagnosis from political authorization (Huang 2026). The present paper preserves that boundary even where a mechanism is well specified.

A configuration-sensitive response can still be unlawful, discriminatory, opaque, or institutionally unaccountable. A task-relative non-dominated forcing profile can still distribute risks or burdens in unacceptable ways. Preserved revisability can benefit actors with greater future access to decision processes while leaving others exposed to continuing uncertainty. Terminal openness can support adaptation in one setting while undermining legitimate expectations or necessary coordination in another. These possibilities are not anomalies in the framework. They show that dynamical properties and normative properties answer different questions.

The same restraint applies to apparently favorable dynamical quantities. More reachable futures do not entail greater welfare. Greater revisability does not entail greater justice. A larger response repertoire does not entail more democratic or legitimate governance. Lower structural entrenchment does not automatically dominate a durable commitment that protects an independently justified right or function. The forcing profile is best read as a comparative description of represented structural consequences, not as a moral index.

Normative analysis can nevertheless use the dynamical results as inputs. If two otherwise admissible responses differ substantially in correction capacity, entrenchment, or distribution of closure, those differences can be relevant to political judgment. Their relevance has to be mediated by additional principles concerning authority, rights, fairness, responsibility, protection, participation, or other normative considerations appropriate to the domain. A complete theory of those principles lies outside the present inquiry. Its contribution is prior: it separates some dynamical consequences that a normative theory may need to evaluate.

This boundary also protects the philosophical comparison from retroactive validation. Even if all four candidate mechanisms were empirically supported in a specified domain, the result would not establish that *wuwei* is normatively correct as a complete doctrine. It would show that selected practical intuitions reconstructed from that tradition have contemporary dynamical explanations under the specified conditions. Historical interpretation, empirical mechanism, and political justification remain distinct forms of inquiry.

10.9 Compound Failure and the Remaining Explanatory Claim

The failure layers can interact. A poor state representation can generate a false criticality diagnosis; a mistaken diagnosis can motivate a mechanism that appears more consequential than it is; an overbroad reconstruction can then make the resulting correspondence seem stronger than the independent evidence warrants. Horizon choice, task definition, and aggregation of affected parties can reinforce the same error. For this reason, applications should not test the layers only in isolation. They should examine whether several reasonable choices produce a stable explanatory conclusion and identify where the conclusion depends on a narrow conjunction of assumptions.

Interaction among failure layers leaves the value of modular analysis intact. It makes dependency tracing more important. If a result depends on a particular horizon but is otherwise robust, the conclusion should be reported as horizon-sensitive. If it depends on a contested interpretation of *wuwei*, the dynamical mechanism can be retained while the philosophical correspondence is weakened. If near-criticality is unsupported but state-dependent response effects are well established, the explanation can be reformulated as a non-criticality-specific mechanism rather than preserved under an inaccurate regime label. Revision should occur at the layer where support changes.

The surviving claim is deliberately bounded. Under a defensible restricted reconstruction of the relevant *wuwei* intuitions, an adequate representation of state-dependent response effects, and scope conditions matched to the mechanism, contemporary dynamical reasoning can furnish candidate explanatory correspondences for configuration-sensitive responsiveness, task-relative non-forcing, preservation of revisability, and, in a narrower form, openness of terminal structure. Describing any of these explanations as specifically criticality-based requires the additional showing that the near-critical profile contributes something beyond generic nonlinearity or path dependence. The claim weakens when those conditions fail and remains separate from normative authorization.

Explicit fallibility belongs to the explanatory architecture itself. A cross-framework explanation is informative only if its philosophical target, dynamical mechanism, scope, and failure conditions remain separately inspectable. The next section can therefore turn from local mechanism assessment to the broader methodological significance of the inquiry: how a classical practical intuition and a contemporary dynamical framework can converge at a restricted explanatory level without being merged into one theory.

11 Cross-Framework Explanation and Governance Interpretation

The preceding sections developed and evaluated four restricted correspondences between *wuwei*-related practical intuitions and candidate dynamical mechanisms under a conditional near-critical regime. This section considers what kind of contribution such a comparison can support. Its role is methodological and synthetic: it examines explanatory reconstruction, translation across frameworks, the joint significance of the four mechanisms, the relation between responsiveness and control, requirements for empirical or computational extension, and the bounded relevance of the framework to governance theory. Historical, conceptual, empirical, and normative commitments remain separately assessable throughout.

11.1 Explanatory Reconstruction as a Distinct Contribution

The paper has treated the relation between *wuwei* and near-critical dynamics as an explanatory reconstruction. This form of contribution occupies a middle position between historical exegesis and direct scientific validation. Historical interpretation asks what a concept meant within the texts, debates, and practical horizons in which it developed. Dynamical analysis asks how a represented system changes under disturbances, responses, and historically inherited configurations. Explanatory reconstruction asks whether a mechanism formulated in the latter vocabulary can make a restricted proposition reconstructed in the former vocabulary more intelligible under declared conditions.

This separation matters because the two frameworks carry different burdens of proof. A textual interpretation requires philological and historical support. A criticality claim requires empirical or model-based support for the relevant regime attribution. A mechanism claim requires evidence that the proposed state dependence, closure effect, repertoire change, or entrenchment process actually occurs in the application under consideration. A normative recommendation requires further principles concerning legitimacy, rights, fairness, authority, protection, or other domain-relevant values. None of these burdens is discharged merely because the vocabularies exhibit an appealing resemblance.

The explanatory reconstruction developed here has a narrower ambition. It offers a way to restate a family of practical intuitions so that candidate mechanisms and failure conditions become inspectable. Configuration-sensitive responsiveness can be connected to state-dependent intervention effects. Restraint toward unnecessary forcing can be connected to response-induced closure, recovery loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment. Terminal openness can be connected, under narrower conditions, to multiplicity among task-admissible successor structures. Preservation of revisability can be connected to the maintenance of return, recovery, and redirection pathways. These connections remain conditional, but they transform an otherwise loose analogy into a set of inspectable explanatory proposals.

The distinction also protects both sides of the comparison. The *Laozi* and later interpretations of *wuwei* need not be rewritten as precursors of dynamical-systems theory in order to remain philosophically

productive (Slingerland 2003a; Slingerland 2003b; Chan 2025). Conversely, a contemporary criticality framework need not inherit Daoist metaphysics, ethics, or political commitments in order to explain why certain non-forcing practices may become intelligible under particular dynamical conditions. The value of the comparison lies partly in preserving this remainder.

Remark 11.1 (Explanatory reconstruction with retained remainder). An informative cross-framework explanation can increase intelligibility while leaving historical meaning, ontology, empirical status, and normative justification partially unreduced. Retained remainder is compatible with such explanatory success. In the present paper, it is also a safeguard against theoretical merger.

The methodological gain is modest but useful. Concepts that are often discussed at the level of aphorism or general political temperament become available for mechanism-sensitive inquiry without requiring them to lose their philosophical provenance. At the same time, contemporary formal language is prevented from claiming more historical or normative authority than its evidence supports. The resulting relation is one of constrained explanatory contact, with identity neither required nor presumed.

11.2 Translation across Frameworks and Partial Equivalence

Cross-framework inquiry requires translation, and the translation used here is selective. Specific questions and propositions are carried across the interface only to the extent needed for structural comparison; the wider philosophical doctrine remains outside the dynamical vocabulary. This distinction is important because broad conceptual equivalence is rarely needed for explanatory work and can obscure the very differences that make comparison informative.

The translation used here operates at several limited interfaces. The first interface concerns the *object of response*: a philosophical emphasis on responsiveness can be compared with a dynamical account in which intervention effects depend on the configuration into which a response enters. The second concerns the *structural footprint of action*: a practical concern with forcing can be compared with closure, recovery loss, repertoire contraction, and entrenchment. The third concerns the *determination of outcomes*: tolerance for partially unspecified terminal form can be compared with situations in which several successor configurations satisfy a declared task projection and side constraints while differing in wider relational consequences. The fourth concerns the *continuation structure after action*: preservation of revisability can be compared with maintenance of pathways for return, functional recovery, or redirection.

Each interface translates only enough structure to formulate an explanatory correspondence. The residual differences remain analytically significant. Philosophical *wuwei* is embedded in a wider vocabulary concerning action, cultivation, order, spontaneity, and relation to the *Dao*; the present forcing profile does not capture those dimensions. Near-criticality is a claim about represented relational dynamics; it does not reproduce the ethical, existential, or cosmological texture of classical thought. Even the most fully specified correspondence in Section 9 remains a partial bridge between differently constituted frameworks.

This partiality is productive because it allows the direction of explanation to remain explicit. The present paper asks whether contemporary dynamics can help explain the practical intelligibility of restricted *wuwei*-related propositions. It does not infer that the historical texts anticipated the contemporary formalism. The difference between retrospective resemblance and mechanism-based explanation is especially important when modern technical terms carry scientific prestige. A contemporary vocabulary can clarify a mechanism without retroactively conferring scientific status on the historical source.

The same restraint applies in the opposite direction. Philosophical vocabulary can help identify questions that a dynamical framework might otherwise formulate too narrowly. The distinction between response magnitude and forcing is one example. A purely scalar control vocabulary can make it natural to compare interventions by size or speed, whereas the reconstructed non-forcing intuition directs attention to structural consequences that need not track magnitude. The distinction between recovery and revisability provides another example: asking whether a system can return to one desirable state differs

from asking whether several meaningful redirections remain possible after intervention. In this sense, philosophical concepts can contribute to problem formulation even when they do not supply empirical mechanisms.

Cross-framework explanation can be reciprocal in heuristic value while remaining asymmetric in evidential role. The historical-philosophical framework can motivate distinctions, questions, and interpretive targets. The dynamical framework can propose mechanisms and formal comparison structures. Empirical inquiry must still determine whether those mechanisms operate in a specified domain. Normative inquiry must still determine which consequences matter and under what principles. The frameworks can inform one another without becoming interchangeable.

11.3 A Family of Responsive Governance Mechanisms

The four correspondences share an interest in how action enters an evolving relational configuration, but they evaluate different objects. Configuration sensitivity concerns the information used to generate response. Non-forcing concerns structural consequences that exceed a declared task projection on the represented forcing dimensions. Terminal openness concerns additional pre-specification where more than one terminal structure remains admissible under independently supplied constraints. Revisability concerns the correction, recovery, and redirection structure left after action. Because these objects can vary independently, the framework is better read as a profile than as a scalar measure of responsiveness or *wuwei*.

This profile also clarifies the relation to ordinary governance vocabulary. Responsiveness remains compatible with decisive or high-magnitude intervention because it concerns conditioning on configuration. Non-forcing concerns structural footprint rather than intensity. Terminal openness concerns the granularity of advance specification rather than indecision, and revisability concerns continuation structure rather than refusal to commit. Target-state control remains appropriate where tasks are sufficiently specified, response effects are stable enough for the purpose, and path or closure effects are limited. The present analysis identifies circumstances in which those conditions weaken; it does not replace control with a doctrine of non-control.

Near-criticality has a correspondingly limited role. Elevated susceptibility, organized persistence, and continuing reconfigurability may make configuration differences, pathway closure, and successor-structure changes more persistent or consequential over a relevant horizon (Huang 2026). That is the proposed criticality-specific increment. Where the same explanatory contrast survives unchanged under ordinary nonlinear, adaptive, or path-dependent baselines, the stronger criticality label should be withheld. Neither version determines an appropriate response without independently supplied tasks, side constraints, affected-party scope, and normative principles.

11.4 Empirical and Computational Extension

The formalism in this paper is schematic. Moving from explanatory reconstruction to domain-specific testing requires a second stage in which the abstract objects are tied to observable or estimable structures. That transition is substantial because the key quantities in the framework depend on representation, horizon, feasible-action specification, and counterfactual comparison.

A first empirical task is regime attribution. Applications would need evidence that the relevant political or institutional system exhibits the susceptibility, organized persistence, and continued reconfigurability associated with the declared near-critical regime. The predecessor hypothesis offers a conceptual basis for such investigation, but the present paper does not establish a general empirical classification of international politics as near-critical (Huang 2026). Regime attribution is therefore an application-specific inference with explicit uncertainty. A second comparison is equally important: neighboring non-critical nonlinear, adaptive, or path-dependent models should be examined to determine whether the proposed mechanism gains explanatory leverage from the joint near-critical profile or is already accounted for by more generic dynamics.

A further task is construction of an adequate relational state representation. The state vector or graph should include variables and relations that plausibly mediate the consequences being studied. Different applications can require institutional, network, strategic, informational, legal, ecological, or economic components. The choice should be justified by the mechanism rather than by formal convenience alone. Robustness analysis should then test whether the central comparison survives defensible alternative representations.

Another task is estimation of response effects and reachable futures. Historical data, process tracing, simulation, agent-based models, network models, system identification, or other computational methods may be appropriate depending on the domain. The relevant object is not merely the immediate outcome after intervention. The analysis should estimate how a response changes the distribution or structure of later trajectories, recovery possibilities, response repertoires, and entrenchment. Uncertainty should remain visible because counterfactual reachable sets can rarely be observed directly.

Operationalization of the forcing-profile dimensions forms an additional task. Closure can be represented through lost reachable regions or eliminated pathways; recovery loss through loss of declared recovery targets; repertoire contraction through reduction of effective actions available under later conditions; and entrenchment through persistence, switching cost, dependency, or institutional lock-in measures appropriate to the domain. The present framework does not prescribe a universal metric for these dimensions. Domain-specific operationalization is preferable to a premature cross-domain index.

Comparison across horizons and affected parties is also required. Short-horizon and long-horizon assessments may disagree. Aggregate flexibility can coexist with local irreversibility. Empirical work should therefore report whose revisability, whose response repertoire, and which functions are represented. This requirement connects the dynamical model to later normative analysis without making the dynamical quantities themselves normative scores.

Computational experiments could be especially useful for studying conditions under which the correspondences weaken. One could vary susceptibility, feedback delay, network coupling, disturbance structure, or task constraints and examine when configuration-sensitive responses outperform target-only rules on declared performance criteria; when terminal pre-specification creates additional path closure; or when different intervention profiles produce similar immediate outcomes but divergent future response capacity. Such experiments would not by themselves validate a historical interpretation of *wuwei*. They would test candidate mechanisms that have been motivated by the explanatory reconstruction.

Accordingly, the research programme is sequential in burden of support but iterative in practice. Historical and philosophical interpretation specifies the propositions carefully enough to avoid anachronism. Dynamical theory proposes candidate mechanisms. Empirical and computational inquiry tests those mechanisms in particular domains. Normative theory evaluates the resulting distributions, authorities, protections, and burdens. Results from later stages can also revise the earlier reconstruction by revealing that a proposed correspondence was too broad, too narrow, or attached to the wrong mechanism.

11.5 Governance Relevance and the Boundary of Generalization

Although the motivating context is international politics, the framework addresses a broader class of governance problems in which interventions enter evolving relational systems and can alter the structure of future action. Institutional design, organizational governance, crisis response, regulation, conflict management, and other domains can exhibit this general form. No shared dynamical regime is assumed across these domains. The framework instead identifies a set of questions that may be useful where state dependence, path dependence, reconfigurability, and response-induced closure are empirically important.

The first question is whether the proposed response is conditioned on the configuration that mediates its effects. The second is whether accomplishing the immediate task requires the structural closure the response creates. The third is whether dimensions of terminal form have been fixed because the task requires them or because control architecture defaults to pre-specification. The fourth is whether pathways for correction, recovery, or redirection remain available to relevant affected parties. These questions can be asked outside a Daoist vocabulary, which indicates that the dynamical contribution is not dependent

on adopting the philosophy as a governance doctrine.

The philosophical vocabulary remains useful as a source of questions about how action enters an evolving field of relations, how structural imposition differs from intervention magnitude, and when enabling conditions may matter alongside advance specification of outcomes. The present paper treats that contribution as heuristic and reconstructive. Whether these questions improve governance analysis in a particular domain is an empirical and theoretical matter for that domain rather than a result established by the cross-framework comparison itself.

Any generalization is best attempted mechanism by mechanism. A domain in which intervention effects are nearly linear and stable may offer little additional rationale for configuration-sensitive responsiveness. A domain in which one terminal form is independently required may leave little role for terminal openness. A domain in which durable closure is necessary for protection may make revisability a secondary consideration over the relevant horizon. Another domain may exhibit severe state dependence and high correction costs, making revisability and non-forcing comparatively important. The framework predicts variation in relevance rather than one governance style across settings.

Mechanism-specific generalization also limits ideological appropriation. The framework remains compatible with strong or weak, centralized or distributed, and more or less interventionist arrangements depending on the task and relational consequences; it supplies no general case for laissez-faire policy, anti-institutionalism, or withdrawal from collective action. Strong coordination can be responsive; durable institutions can preserve correction capacity; centralized action can sometimes reduce wider entrenchment; and non-intervention can itself permit irreversible closure generated by ongoing dynamics. The analytical unit is the relation between response, configuration, task, and future structural consequence.

The framework likewise leaves political authorization outside its direct scope. A response that performs well on the four dynamical dimensions can still lack legitimate authority or violate independent constraints. A response that performs poorly on revisability may still be required under a defensible protective or legal obligation. Governance theory can use the dynamical analysis as one layer of judgment, while institutional and normative principles determine how that layer should be weighted relative to other considerations.

11.6 Methodological Implications for Relational Political Inquiry

The broader methodological implication concerns how political inquiry can use concepts drawn from historically distant frameworks while preserving their differences. Global commensurability is unnecessary when a sufficiently precise local question, independently specified terms, a mechanism capable of carrying explanatory weight, and visible remainder make the interface assessable.

This approach differs from using classical philosophy as decorative analogy. Decorative analogy leaves the contemporary mechanism unchanged and adds a historical label after the fact. The present procedure begins by reconstructing a restricted proposition independently, specifying the dynamical mechanism independently, and then asking whether the mechanism explains something about the proposition under stated conditions. The possibility of failed correspondence is essential. Without that possibility, the comparison would be protected from criticism and would provide little explanatory information.

The approach also differs from theoretical unification. The four correspondences do not imply that *wuwei* and criticality theory belong to one comprehensive system. Their ontological commitments, evidential bases, and normative purposes remain different. What they share is a restricted explanatory interface concerning action in state-dependent, historically evolving relational configurations. The interface can be informative precisely because it is narrower than either framework as a whole.

For relational political inquiry, this suggests a general research strategy. Practical concepts can be decomposed into claims about information, intervention, transformation, continuation, and evaluation. Dynamical models can then be used to investigate the mechanisms relevant to those claims without presuming that the model exhausts the concept. Conversely, philosophical distinctions can reveal dimensions of action that a technical model has omitted, prompting refinement of the represented state

or the comparison criterion. The exchange can be generative when each framework remains capable of correcting the other at the interface.

The resulting picture of *wuwei* under near-criticality remains plural rather than formulaic. The four dimensions describe different features of response and need not co-vary. Their conjunction may motivate a style of analysis attentive to evolving relations and future correction, while its relevance remains contingent on regime, task projection, side constraints, scale, horizon, distribution, and normative judgment.

This is the level at which the paper's central reinterpretation can be retained with the greatest precision. Contemporary dynamics can supply candidate explanatory correspondences for selected *wuwei*-related intuitions in some governance settings; a specifically near-critical interpretation is warranted only when the criticality-specific increment is shown rather than assumed. The explanation remains conditional and partial; the philosophical tradition retains meanings beyond the formal mechanisms; and dynamical analysis retains empirical and normative questions that the philosophical comparison does not settle. The final section summarizes the argument without adding another layer of machinery, returning to the four restricted propositions and the boundary between explanatory insight and political authorization.

12 Conditional Dynamical Explanation and Its Boundaries

This paper examined whether the Criticality Hypothesis of International Politics can contribute to a contemporary explanation of a restricted family of governance-oriented propositions reconstructed in relation to *wuwei*. The inquiry separated historical reconstruction, regime attribution, mechanism specification, explanatory correspondence, empirical support, and normative authorization. That separation supports a deliberately limited conclusion. The analysis identifies candidate explanatory correspondences for several restricted propositions, while leaving their empirical prevalence, historical completeness, and political justification open to independent assessment.

Configuration-sensitive responsiveness receives a state-dependent contrast: the same represented target discrepancy can coexist with different response effects when configuration changes the coupling, susceptibility, or inherited transition structure relevant to action. Task-relative non-forcing receives a structural contrast among responses that satisfy the same declared task projection while differing on independently specified dimensions of closure, recovery loss, repertoire contraction, or entrenchment. Revisability receives a continuation-structure contrast when responses comparable on the present task leave different capacities for later correction, recovery, or redirection. These correspondences are candidates for explanation because their mechanisms add discriminating content beyond the definitions of the propositions; they remain conditional on the adequacy of the representation, comparison class, horizon, and scope.

Terminal openness has a larger unresolved bridge. Multiple successor structures alone provide no reason to leave terminal form open. The candidate correspondence requires more than one terminal structure to satisfy task and side constraints supplied independently of the dynamics, current evidence and declared criteria to leave selection non-unique, and additional pre-specification to remove continuation possibilities represented as relevant to later adaptation, learning, or correction. Even then, the result is a conditional mechanism for why pre-specification can matter, not a general preference for indeterminacy.

Across all four correspondences, the language of tasks, admissibility, relevance, protection, and avoidability is indexed to criteria supplied to the model. The dynamical framework can compare consequences once those criteria are declared; it does not establish their legal, ethical, or political authority. Likewise, equality on a task projection is not overall equivalence: responses can still differ in distribution, robustness, timing, legality, cost, or effects on parties omitted from the representation. These qualifications are part of the inferential structure rather than after-the-fact disclaimers.

The criticality claim is narrower still. State dependence, path dependence, irreversibility, and adaptive response occur outside near-critical regimes. A specifically criticality-based interpretation therefore requires comparison with suitable nonlinear, adaptive, or path-dependent baselines and evidence that the

joint profile of elevated susceptibility, organized persistence, and continuing reconfigurability changes the persistence, reach, or consequence of the mechanism over the relevant horizon (Huang 2026). If that increment is unsupported, the corresponding result should be retained, if at all, as a generic dynamical explanation rather than under a criticality label.

The broader methodological proposal is *explanatory reconstruction with retained remainder*. Restricted propositions drawn from a philosophical tradition can be placed in contact with contemporary mechanisms without converting the historical concept into a scientific theory or treating the modern model as a source of normative authority. Historical interpretation retains philological remainder; dynamical claims retain empirical and representational remainder; political judgment retains legal, ethical, institutional, and distributive remainder. The comparison is informative to the extent that these interfaces and remainders remain visible and revisable.

Future work can test the proposed correspondences by making their intermediate layers contestable: regime attribution, state representation, comparison classes, counterfactual response effects, forcing dimensions, correction pathways, horizons, and affected-party scope. Such work may strengthen, narrow, reformulate, or reject individual correspondences. The framework is designed to permit those outcomes. Its present contribution is consequently modest: it offers a structured way to ask when selected *wuwei*-related intuitions acquire dynamical intelligibility, while leaving the authority to choose and justify a political course to arguments capable of bearing those additional burdens.

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